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ABSTRACT

This book was written with the intention of presenting meaningful and interesting information about education in Japan in a way so that readers will obtain a more complete understanding of it. There are three characteristic ways the Japanese think about education: (1) there is an emotionally charged "penchant for education," which is not necessarily logically based; (2) the fundamental purpose of education is toward the cultivation of character or "kokoro"; and (3) there is a push toward "equality" in education in that all children can and should develop in the same manner. The teaching of knowledge and skills is referred to as "training" and is given a status lower than that given to character development. The history of education in Japan is presented to provide context for the maintenance of these values and their selective evolution that helped the country recover from World War II and eventually become an economic superpower. The various values and facets of education in Japan present both strengths and hindrances to modernization in ways that can be difficult for somebody outside the country's culture to understand. It is hoped that this book will shed light on these traits, values, strengths, and problems that make Japanese education distinctively unique. (RT)

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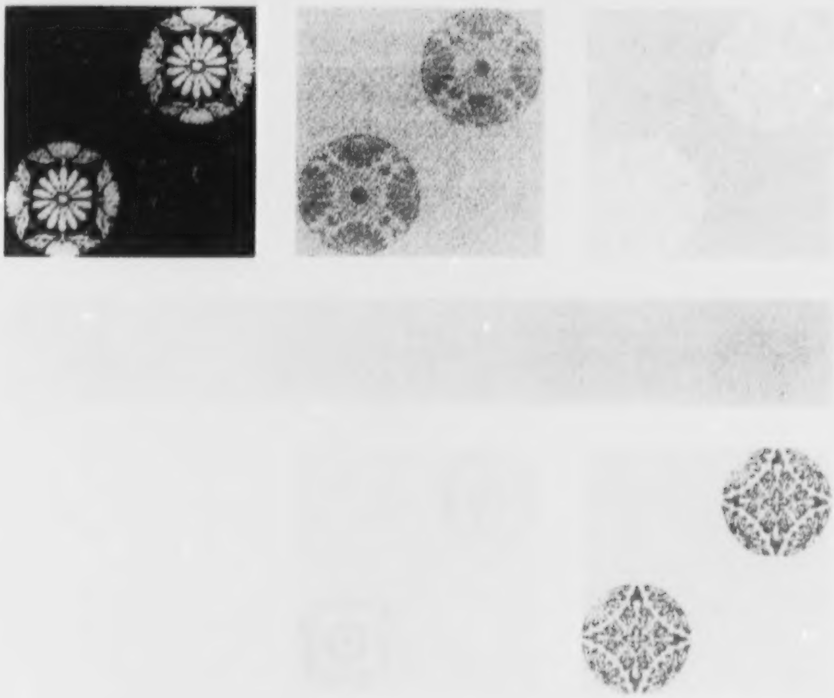
# EDUCATION OF THE RISING SUN 21

## — An Introduction to Education in Japan —

OKAMOTO Kaoru



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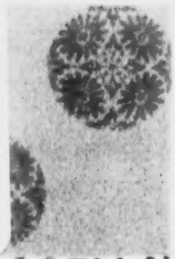

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# EDUCATION OF THE RISING SUN 21

## — An Introduction to Education in Japan —

OKAMOTO Kaoru

NFSE

## PREFACE

The first edition of this book was written and published in English in 1992 under the title of "Education of the Rising Sun" based mainly on my experiences in the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) in Paris, where I worked as a professional staff member twice: 1981-82 and 1987-90. I was in charge of international comparative research on educational policies and practices, and actually learned more about Japan rather than other Member countries.

Back in the Ministry of Education, Science & Culture of the Government of Japan in 1990, I happened to be appointed as the Deputy-Director of its International Affairs Division, and had a number of chances to talk with overseas visitors and experts. There I found out that materials made for foreign visitors to explain education in Japan by the Ministry did not present enough meaningful and interesting information to satisfy the many foreign experts searching for a basic understanding of Japanese education. A key problem was that much fascinating material about everyday practices was neglected because such things were "too normal" to be included. This made me write the first edition of this book in order to show some crucial points in education in Japan from the view point of socio-cultural analysis. Since the publication of the first edition ten years ago, more than 7,000 copies have been published and distributed to a number of countries and used by many experts.

The second edition of this book was published in 1997 in Japanese language under the title of "Fushigi no Kuni no Gakko-Kyoiku", developing the first edition and translating it into Japanese by myself. For various reasons, this was published under a pen name (Jacque Collinault), and more than 10,000 copies were sold/distributed to those interested in educational reform.

The present third edition was further developed from the above second edition and was translated back into English. Since the early 1990's, not a few changes and developments have taken place in education in Japan, however, writing this third edition, I found out that almost all of the cultural foundations and Japanese ways of thinking towards education described and analyzed in the first edition were still valid and continued to affect relevant policies and practices. I believe that we should encourage foreign experts and visitors to look carefully into the backgrounds of our educational issues without the blur from the simplistic or sensationalistic surface. I hope that this third edition, "Education of the Rising Sun 21" published at the beginning of the 21st century will help those interested in education in Japan in some way.

Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to one of my best friends, Dr. Joseph E. Hicks, who helped me a lot to develop the English expressions in this book.

Kaoru OKAMOTO

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## *Chapter I*

# What the Japanese Think about Education

Education holds a very special place in the hearts of most Japanese people and, while this is also true for some other East Asian nations, it may be difficult for a number of people from other countries to imagine just how deeply the Japanese feel about education and learning. Generally speaking, there are three characteristic ways of thinking about education among the Japanese as follows:

(1) There is an emotionally charged "penchant for education" (especially in the case of children's school education) which is not necessarily logically based.

(2) The fundamental purpose of education is towards the spirit (i.e. character development) and the nurturing of what the Japanese call "kokoro".

(3) There is a very strong push towards "equality" in education.

## A. The Japanese Penchant for Education

The Japanese have a strong affinity towards education, especially school education for children. They put great stock in all forms of education, learning and intellectual developments. It could be said that this "love of education" is more emotional rather than based on something rational or logical, such as a cost-benefit analysis or goal/means thinking.

Asked to imagine something highly emotional or spiritual where something is valued without seemingly logical reasons, one of the first things that comes to mind must be "religion". Without wishing to offend anyone, one could take this line of thought and go as far as to say that education is something like a "religion" for the Japanese.

It is interesting to note that this penchant for education of the Japanese is by no means a recent phenomenon. In the early 1850's, the era when Commodore Perry of the US Navy and his fleet of black ships intruded into Japanese waters, after a peaceful 260-year closed-door period (Edo Period), demanding opening of some ports for trade and bases for whaling, some 40% of elementary school aged boys and 15% of the same age group of girls were enrolled in elementary level schools in Japan. These schools included samurai clan schools called "han-koh" for the boys of the samurai class established by more than 100 local feudal lords as well as many smaller private schools called "tera-koya" for children of the other classes. A look at the world of this time reveals these enrollment rates to be almost on a par with the developed countries in Europe of that era.

Japan from the 1600's to the mid-1800's had a caste-like social system generally characterized by four main classes: the samurai, the farmers, the artisans, and the merchants. Of these four groups, the farmers made up about 80% of the total population. A look at school enrollment by social class shows some remarkable figures. Considering that the non-agricultural classes comprised only 20% of the population (with the remaining 80% being made up of farmers--including the poorest of the serfs), it follows that even with full enrollment for the other three social classes, one out of four farmers' sons was attending a private school at the time. Furthermore, as these children had virtually no chance of becoming a samurai even if they did go to school, this leaves us only with a "penchant for education" to explain this high level of enrollment.

Some scholars would assert that the reason behind this "penchant for education" was economic development, viz. reading, writing and arithmetic were skills needed even by the poorest farmers at a later stage of the Edo Period in the 1850's. Nonetheless, looking at the situation in those days, it is clear that the Japanese had (and still have) a great enthusiasm for education.

It is peculiar that there is little interest found among the Japanese as to the reasons for this penchant for education. In fact, people in Japan seem to take it for granted, and it does not provoke their curiosity or academic interest. This enthusiasm or penchant for education, therefore, is seldom discussed or carefully researched in Japan as it is too normal for the Japanese, and they are often truly shocked to discover that people in other countries do not necessarily have the same kind of penchant for education that they do.

A couple of decades ago, during the publication boom of Nihonjin-ron books and articles (socio-cultural analyses of the Japanese ranging from lighthearted/headed to scholarly and serious), a Japanese scholar made a comparative study on the cultural differences between 3rd-4th generation Japanese-Americans in Hawaii and Japanese living in Japan. The results of this study showed that although the 3rd and 4th generation Japanese born in Hawaii were genetically Japanese, they were culturally (in both thought and behavior) American and not Japanese. This means that, since ways of thinking and value systems are not genetically determined, they must have been learned somewhere.

These kinds of things should have been learned in the family, at school, in the local community and/or in the workplace, etc. The question remains, though, as to just where did the Japanese acquire this affinity for education? There have been some hypotheses proposed by scholars such as Confucianism, Buddhism, paddy rice field cultivation, etc. The values harvested from these sources may have been passed down via spontaneous learning from generation to generation, and not programmed into anyone's DNA.

## B. Purpose of Education: "Kokoro"

The second characteristic way of thinking about education among most Japanese has to do with the fundamental "purpose" of education, which is more towards spiritual aspects and character development, i.e. what the Japanese call "kokoro", rather than practical knowledge and skills.

"Kokoro" is a concept with a wide range of connotations including heart, mind, soul, spirit, attitude, value system and humanity. As witnessed by the frequent use of slogans extolling the virtues of "education for kokoro", it can be said that the fundamental purpose of education in Japan is surprisingly defined in nothing but spiritual, loftier terms such as "kokoro" or character development. Indeed this fact is not unrelated to the unusually high priority placed on education in Japan. Moreover, because education is believed to be more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills: something with a highly spiritual purpose, the Japanese consider it, in fact, something extremely lofty.

This way of thinking is also shown in Article 1 of Japan's Fundamental Law of Education, which clearly and officially spells out the fundamental purpose of education:

> Article 1 (Purpose of Education)
>
> "Education must be carried out with the intention of aiming at the full character development of all people and at nurturing the citizens who, as the builders of a peaceful nation and society, will cherish truth and justice, respect the value of the individual, value hard work and responsibility, have independent minds, and be physically and mentally healthy."

This passage clearly shows some characteristics of the Japanese way of thinking about education, however, above and beyond the ones written in the text such as "peace", "justice", and "hard work", what is truly striking is not what is "written" in the text but what is "missing" from it: the concepts of "knowledge and skills".

If someone brings this up with in conversation with most Japanese people they will no doubt give you the following reply: "the way I see it, there is plenty of emphasis placed on knowledge and skills development at school but not enough on nurturing kokoro". This is a fact, and the reason for this will be discussed later on in this book. However, here one can find something unique among the so-called developed countries: a nation where people always think that the problem with schools is that "there is not enough emphasis placed on kokoro", i.e. schools should be responsible for better nurturing of "kokoro". Even more interesting is the fact that the great majority of Japanese do not realize this; they take it for granted.

## Education for Kokoro and the Scope of the Concept of "Education"

One thing that education experts from other countries need to be careful about, when talking with their Japanese counterparts, is the difference in meaning between the word "kyoiku" (the literal Japanese translation of the word "education") and "education" in English. In fact, there is a significant difference in the scope of the word "education" in a number of other developed countries and the scope of the word "kyoiku" in Japanese.

Generally speaking, in accordance with the above Article from the Fundamental Law of Education, only things/activities related to the goal (not necessarily results) of fully developing the "character" are considered "kyoiku", and things/activities only for the purpose of learning "knowledge and skills" are called "training" in Japan, which is of course not afforded as high of a status as "kyoiku".

It also follows that the sectors of learning in which knowledge and skills are given central importance, such as vocational training in specialized facilities for this purpose, are excluded from the scope of "kyoiku" in Japan but considered part of "education" in a number of other countries. In the case of these sectors, what is included in the scope of "kyoiku" in Japan is narrower than what is considered "education" in most other developed countries.

On the other hand, some activities, which would be considered "kyoiku" in Japan, might very well not be considered as "education" in other countries. These would be activities with the approach of only character or "kokoro" development, having little to do with knowledge and skills.

One example of this would be so-called "special educational activities" carried out in all 40,000 elementary and secondary schools in Japan as a compulsory part of their curricula. They consist of a wide range of group, cultural, sporting and other activities at school outside the academic subjects (math, science, language, etc.), which are enthusiastically pursued at all Japanese primary and secondary schools.

Similar activities are found in some other countries, however, they are usually called "extra-curricular activities". On the other hand, in the case of the "special educational activities" in Japan, they should be planned and carried out based on the National Curriculum Standard designated by the national education authorities (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), and they are actually "intra-curricular" and compulsory: an entirely different category than extra-curricular activities.

## C. Push towards Equality

The third characteristic way of thinking about education among most Japanese people is a strong demand for "equality" in education, which could be called "rage for equality", especially in the case of compulsory school education.

If various economic indices such as income distribution, etc. are taken into account then post WWII Japan is no doubt one of the most egalitarian nations in the world. Moreover, the Japanese have become one of the world's most sensitive people when it comes to equality. This tendency seems even more strongly manifested in education, notably children's education which is placed in very high regard.

Egalitarianism in education in Japan is by no means unrelated to the "fundamental purpose of education" in this country. As was previously mentioned, the fundamental purpose of education in Japan does not lie in the learning of knowledge and skills, but in the full development of character or "kokoro", and at least in terms of goals and ideals, spiritual values are emphasized.

The Japanese do recognize that there are differences in abilities among people; accordingly they are able to gracefully accept differences in the case of knowledge and skills measured by various types of qualification systems and license or certification examinations. However, in the case of school education in Japan, where the fundamental purpose lies in character or "kokoro" of children and not in knowledge and skills, making differences in education is tantamount to making discriminations in opportunities for character and spiritual development for "kokoro". This is something difficult to accept not only for the Japanese but for people of other countries as well.

Due to this mentality, there is a very strong resistance toward the establishment of any kind of ability-based differentiation such as class streaming. This mindset might be somewhat difficult to follow for the people in many other countries who are accustomed to ability grouping. However, trying to imagine the pastor of a Protestant Church dividing his or her faithful flock into "A-rank believers" and "B-rank believers", it might be easier to grasp the situation here. In the eyes of God, believers are all equal, and it would be a completely unacceptable sort of discrimination to differentiate between believers.

In Japan, like the example of Christian churches in the West, the same kind of thing happens as the spiritual aspects rule over school education. The purpose of Japanese school education can be compared, to some extent, to that of religion in the West. It also should be noted that a significant problem arises for the Japanese when they confuse differentiation related to spiritual aspects with that related to knowledge and skills. No matter how much emphasis the Japanese may place on the full development of character or "kokoro" as a goal of school education, a great deal of knowledge and skills are being taught at school anyway, and quite naturally, differences in individual ability will arise here. The two aspects are quite often confused in Japan, and the result is a stubborn refusal to group or make any differentiation among children even if it is only according to knowledge and skills.

## Equality of Opportunity vs. Equality of Outcome

Among the so-called developed nations, it has been said that Japan and North American countries have "egalitarian" school systems at the primary and secondary level. However, substantial difference between the two should be recognized.

Generally, in North America, "equality" refers to "equality of opportunity". In stark contrast to this is the Japanese idea of "equality" in school education, which is "equality in terms of outcome". This in itself is a significant characteristic of the Japanese way of thinking about education. In addition, this also may have stemmed from the fundamental purpose of education being placed on character or "kokoro" as well as a confusion between knowledge/skills development and character/kokoro development. Generally speaking, the Japanese think that all children can and should develop in the same manner, and if the children's outcomes are not all the same, it is not considered equality but discrimination.

A very interesting offshoot of this way of thinking is the lack of a certain kind of research in education in Japan. In a number of other countries, there is an overabundance of studies that attempt to correlate various background variables of children with their educational achievements, i.e. grade point average etc. These background variables include: parents' educational background, parents' occupation, parents' income level, family structure, place of residence, race, etc. In Japan such kind of research has been virtually tabooed. It is said that Japanese scholars think that such studies themselves may serve to increase or even justify discrimination. They might take the attitude that if people had the leisure to carry out such research, their time would be better spent doing action research to reduce such educational gaps.

Another issue related to equality in education is control of local educational affairs by the national education authorities. A number of critics claim that there is too much control over the local education authorities (Boards of Education) by the national education authorities (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology) as witnessed by the way the Ministry establishes the National Curriculum Standard and the textbook authorization systems. However, in accordance with the way the Japanese think about education, this control, which is criticized by critics but not by parents, is functioning to provide equal outcomes of school education on a nationwide scale, which the

Japanese public demands. If, for some reason, these systems of control were abolished, the people (especially the parents) would surely demand that the government take responsibility to guarantee nationwide educational equality so that there would be no geographically based discrepancies in outcome.

Japanese school education presently faces not a few difficulties, and one of the fundamental causes of such problems has been a "dilemma" that Japanese people always try to achieve the two contradictory goals of "pursuing a higher level of education" (deriving from the "penchant for education") and "achieving equality of outcomes" (deriving from the "push towards equality") at the same time.

### Equality vs. Uniformity

This way of thinking about education (especially compulsory education: nine years at elementary and lower-secondary schools) has both merits and demerits. On the positive side, it has greatly contributed to the disappearance of class structure through the past 130 years and aided the progress of social equality. Furthermore, every child in Japan has been given a first-class education equally through the strategy of providing "the same good things for all children", and consequently, the intellectual level of the entire country has been raised as a whole.

On the other hand, this way of thinking itself now seems to be causing some serious problems. One is the problem of "excessive uniformity", which is said to have been caused by "outrageous equality". An increasing number of Japanese are now starting to criticize "outrageous equality", and in fact it is frequently pointed out that the excessive push for equality of outcome must have been one of the major reasons for the current serious problem with "uniformity" and "over-rigidity" in school education.

The second problem is the fact that there are now too many “good things” and the above approach has been making children too busy. Japanese school education has attained amazing success even by global standards through the strategy of providing “the same good things for all children”, however, facing a flood of too many new good things such as information technology, environmental issues, practical foreign language proficiency, etc., it may be time to reconsider the above strategy, and to try to identify “what’s really necessary for ‘all’ children”.

The third problem is the following “paradox”, which is now arising because of one of the new good things, which is drawing much attention of the Japanese : respect for “individuality” of each child. This seems to be causing a serious “paradox” in equality in education in the Japanese sense as it inevitably spells an end to “equal outcomes”. The “paradox” here means that, trying to apply the approach of “the same good things for all children”, which is for “equality of outcomes”, to the new value of “respect for individuality” of children, the outcomes will not be equal among children because of their individuality.

Strangely, this paradox has not been noticed or discussed by the Japanese, and slogans like "let’s put more emphasis on the individuality of all children" are prevailing without thoughtful discussion. Taking a step further, it could be said that if such a demand for more individuality takes root, big trouble is in store for the legions of heartfelt supporters of “equality of outcome in education”.

The fourth problem is serious impediments of educational reform (especially the effort to make movements from “uniformity” to “diversity” and from “rigidity” to “flexibility”) caused by the demand for “equal outcome” among Japanese. A number of reasons have been pointed out for the sluggish progress of educational reform in Japanese education; among these are a lack of political leadership, the Japanese penchant for consensus at all costs, a general mistrust and dislike of experimental policies and the remnants of conflicting ideologies. Yet another more important factor is that many Japanese have the following mindset: they feel happy and comfortable by feeling the same as everyone else, and they expect the government (rather than themselves) to help them achieve this blissful state of existence.

Also, although the necessity of "deregulation" and "diversity" in education is often claimed by a lot of people in Japan, and the national education authorities actually want to abolish a number of such regulations, there is little chance for any kind of deregulation in the situation where people, who are happy and comfortable when they feel equal to others, strive for "equal outcomes".

From the standpoint of government policy, it can be said that the factors that cause uniformity, such as regulations, can be removed fairly easily, but "forcing diversity" is practically impossible.

## From a "Dilemma" to a "Trilemma"?

Facing the problem of "excessive uniformity", there has been a recent emphasis on "respect for individuality", however, this seems to be causing another serious problem in Japan. As stated before, many problems of primary and secondary school education are due to the "dilemma" caused by the two contradicting goals of "pursuing a higher level of education" (deriving from the "penchant for education") and "achieving equality of outcomes" (deriving from the "push towards equality") at the same time.

Now, the recent emphasis placed on "respect for individuality" might turn this dilemma into a "trilemma" caused by the above-mentioned "paradox". It seems impossible to aim at the three contradictory goals: "pursuing a higher level of education", "achieving equality of outcome", and "fully respecting for individuality of all children" at the same time.

Japanese people actually have not even noticed or discussed the existing "dilemma", and it seems very likely that they will suffer from more serious problems caused by the possible "trilemma".

## *Chapter II*

# Tangible Results of Japanese Characteristics

In the previous Chapter some characteristic points of the Japanese way of thinking about education were taken up. These kinds of characteristics have made a significant impact on Japan's elementary and secondary education. In this Chapter, these impacts and results are summarized into the following four points for discussion.

(1) Extensive range of responsibilities of schools;
(2) High investment in education;
(3) High status of teachers; and
(4) Political and non-economic nature of education issues.

## A. Extensive Range of Responsibilities of Schools

As previously mentioned, the Japanese put an extremely high value on education (especially on the education of school children), which is not necessarily based on logic. Also, there is a peculiar tendency in Japan in placing their fundamental purpose of education not on knowledge and skills but on character or "kokoro" development.

The first tangible result of these characteristics is that elementary and secondary schools are expected to carry out an almost unbelievably wide range of roles and responsibilities. Japanese parents expect elementary and lower-secondary schools to take responsibility for teaching fundamental etiquette and manners, moral education and discipline: things that are normally taught at home or at Church in a number of other countries. There is an undeniable link between this kind of mentality and the Japanese way of thinking about "spiritual" aspects such as "kokoro" and character as expressed in the fundamental purpose of education.

Elementary and secondary school teachers in Japan are expected to take measures to prevent children from committing delinquent acts as well as carrying out damage control when such acts are committed, even when they occur outside the school grounds. They are considered responsible for pupils' behavior after school hours and even outside of school.

For example, if a pupil is caught shoplifting, the store manager will usually call the offending pupil's homeroom teacher instead of notifying the police. Also, an errant child's homeroom teacher would very likely join parents in a search if one of their pupils' ran away from home. One could go as far as to say that Japanese school teachers are responsible for their charges 24 hours a day, and 365 days a year. Teachers who have to supervise several students with personal or behavioral difficulties spend most of their time, busily handling these kinds of problems outside of school.

Naturally, assuming that Japanese teachers will be counseling homeroom pupils and students about their personal problems, they are also expected to gather all kind of information on their children. This requires that they have to visit all the children's homes, and indeed in most regions of the country, elementary and lower-secondary school teachers make periodic home visits. It is also true that conditions such as these can cause overwork or burnout among serious and earnest teachers, and therefore, the national education authorities finally started a scheme to allocate professional counselors to schools with serious problems.

Such problems of overwork among serious teachers is a critical issue especially at upper-secondary (high school) education in Japan. In 1950 only 40% of children went on to high school. Today this figure is more than 98%. On the other hand, the dropout rate for the three years is only 6%. In addition to the surprisingly high rate of matriculation (where more than 90% of each age group graduate from high school) Japan's high schools are also expected to provide education for "kokoro". Any system with the mandate of handling more than 90% of a very difficult age group (15 to 18 years old) of children, and furthermore, expected to achieve full development of character or "kokoro" as well as "equality of outcome" at the same time for this group of adolescents, should be considered remarkable or even incredible. Indeed, Japan's upper-secondary education can be considered a system with unbelievable roles and responsibilities to fulfill.

This means that in comparison to many other nations, adolescent problems such as violence, prostitution and illegal drug use are largely considered "problems of school education" in Japan. It is indeed unfortunate that no matter how much effort is made, there will always be a certain percentage of adolescents who turn to crime and delinquency. In Japan the likelihood that these troubled and unhappy young people are in high school is extremely high.

One European expert pointed out, "Looking at the enrollment rate and crime rates in Japan, it should not be seen as a nation where high school students commit crimes, but a nation where even criminals can go to high school." When social problems occur, people in most countries will typically say, "School education is to blame." However, for most of these countries, this criticism is leveled in an indirect manner towards the function of school education. In Japan, on the other hand, this criticism is more concrete, severe and directly leveled at schools due to the fact that there is a wider range of roles expected by parents including the development of character and "kokoro" and because the responsibility of school is extended to 24 hours a day.

## B. High Investment in Education

The second tangible result of the characteristics of the Japanese way of thinking about education (especially elementary and secondary education) is the high investment in education. This is of course directly related to the high importance placed on education in this country.

For a long time, in Japan some 5% of the annual national income was invested in school education. There is a recent trend towards decline in this figure, however, in the period when the level was 5%, more than 4% was appropriated for elementary and secondary education, making it one of the highest levels in the world. A point of interest here is that the remaining figure (less than 1%) allocated for higher education was quite low among developed countries.

Even more important than the total scale of investment in school education is the fact that funds for education enjoy a high priority in the national and local government budgets. It is well known that when governments in many countries get into a financial pinch, one of the first things to be cut is the education budget. On the other hand, in Japan children are called "treasures of nation". In particular, their education is given the highest priority in consideration of the future of the nation and society.

It follows that any politician who proposes budget cuts in education had best to be ready for a very powerful backlash. It is almost unheard of for the Parliament to cut education related budget items from the total governmental budget draft, in fact, the national and local parliaments emphasize that education budget should be increased. Moreover, even though the national and local government educational administrators loudly complain about the difficulty of sustaining and increasing funds for education, the situation in Japan is considerably easier than in a number of other countries.

It can be said that there is a strong relationship between significant funding for education in Japan and the Japanese "penchant" for education plus their belief that education is for the full development of character and "kokoro". Again, it should be emphasized that if the fundamental purpose of education was only for acquiring knowledge and skills, then cuts in the education budget would not be such a serious problem. The negative effects could surely be compensated for by enterprise-based continuing education and training as well as various other kinds of learning activities carried out on a lifelong basis. Since school education takes on the responsibility for the full development of character and "kokoro" of children, any cuts in the education budget will be considered as threatening and undermining the spiritual base of people, society and the nation as a whole.

## C. High Status of Teachers

The third result of these characteristic ways of thinking about education (especially elementary and secondary education) is that primary and secondary school teachers have a high status. However, if Japanese teachers heard such a comment, they would probably loudly proclaim that they work under oppressively and unfairly low status. This is of course a common sentiment of workers in various occupations shared in a lot of countries. Nevertheless, in comparing the situation with that of a number of other countries, Japans' teachers can be considered to be enjoying quite a high status. It is appropriate here to differentiate between "economic" status and "social" status when discussing this issue.

## Economic Status

The first important point in considering the status of elementary and secondary school teachers is their "economic" status, that is, their salary level. Japanese public school teachers are local government officials, and their salaries are set about 10% higher than general administrative staff workers in the local government. There seem to be few other countries in the world that take the same measure. In addition, teachers in Japan are paid 100% of their regular salary during summer and other vacation periods.

In international conferences on education policies, it is often argued that there are three factors which determine the quality of elementary and secondary education: a)curriculum, b)teacher quality and c)school management. As to curriculum, the national education authorities of Japan determine the National Curriculum Standard, however, this is very much in the minority in the world. Therefore, discussions on the quality of education in international conferences often address other topics, *inter alia* teacher quality. In the discussions on teacher quality in such international conferences, the issue of salary level is quite often emphasized, together with teacher training, as one of the most important factors to enhance the quality of teachers as a whole. Japan's policy to positively differentiate teachers' salary level is said in such conferences to be functioning well for the sake of higher quality of teachers.

## Social Status

In addition to economic status, another important point in considering the status of elementary and secondary school teachers is their "social" status. Teachers in Japan have a relatively high social status, compared to other occupations. As has been mentioned, for the countries in which school curricula are not controlled by the national government, teacher quality is one of the most decisive factors to determine the quality of schooling as a whole. It follows that the "social" status of teachers is considered even more crucial than economic status to attract good and able people to the teaching profession.

Japanese cultural characteristics such as high social status afforded by teaching, the good image of teachers and confidence in being a teacher are considered by some experts to have come from the influence of Confucianism. Whether they stemmed from Confucianism or not, these characteristics are, to some extent, shared by East Asian countries and are not necessarily uniquely Japanese. It can also be said that these characteristics are not unrelated to the high value placed on education and the fundamental purpose of education lying in the full development of character and "kokoro".

Teachers are given respect in Japan not just because they are doing important practical work or imparting knowledge and skills but because of the higher and loftier role they have in helping children develop their character and "kokoro". There is a Japanese word "sei-shoku", which literally translates to "sacred occupation". Interestingly enough, the meaning of this word is almost always linked to the teaching profession rather than the clergy.

## D. School Education: Politics or Economics

The fourth result of the characteristics of the Japanese way of thinking about education is that education (especially elementary and secondary education) is a highly "political" issue rather than an "economic" one. People in most other countries often see this as quite unusual. In these countries the situation is the opposite: generally speaking, education is seen as a part of economics and is (or, at least, used to be) set apart from politics.

## The Political Nature of Educational Issues

Although it might be difficult for people in other countries to believe, education in Japan (especially the curriculum of elementary and secondary education) is an area that is very easily politicized and can be quickly entangled in various sensitive ideological conflicts.

It is often the case that most participants in international conferences on national education policies (not pedagogical practices) are labor economists as such issues are often considered as part of economic policies to create a productive labor force in a number of countries. Therefore, at least in the past, it was unusual for practical education issues such as the detailed contents of curriculum to be taken up in political debates in most other countries.

Though recently, in a number of countries, leading politicians are making election promises about "education reform" and using it as a key point in their political platforms. In these countries the message has finally come across that improvements in school education mean improvements in the economy (and the converse—if school education is not improved the economy won't, either). It could be said that school education is gradually becoming politicized "via the economy".

On the other hand, in Japan, at least since 1945, education has continued to be an extremely politically charged field. This too can be directly related to the Japanese characteristic of placing the fundamental purpose of education on the development of character and "kokoro" rather than just on the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Concepts like "kokoro" and "jinkaku" (character) sound quite pleasing in Japanese language, however, it should be noted that they are inevitably closely related to "mind", "thought processes" and "ways of thinking", which in turn, go hand in hand with the concept of "ideologies". Japanese schools are expected to nurture positive value systems and attitudes for children as a part of education for "kokoro", which is related to ideologies and thus very sensitive.

One thing that is carried out in schools as a part of "character development" is to foster such attitudes among children as "respect for the elderly" and "kindness to their schoolmates" as good "kokoro". However, when the national education authorities laid down a policy directive requiring the display of the national flag and the singing of the national anthem at all school events, with a view to foster "a respect for the national flag and anthem" as a part of education for "kokoro", this was met with a considerable protest of the people who related them with pre-war militarism and totalitarianism. (The Japanese national flag and anthem are still considered by more than a few people in Japan just like "Wagner's music" in some countries.)

The occurrence of such protest shows that indeed the education of "kokoro" is closely related to thought and ideology formation. If Japan's educational goals were only for knowledge learning and skill acquisition, then such protest would have likely never occurred. Why didn't the same protest occur when teachers were telling the children to be nice to each other and to respect the elderly? These are also ideologies of sorts. The reason is because these ideologies were more universal and widely shared, compared to the case of the more polarized and delicate issue of the national flag and national anthem.

Here, it is also important to understand that in Japan two main groups, the nationalists and the socialists/communists have been at odds with each other since 1945, and have been trying to bring their ideologies into the schools as a part of education for "kokoro". It should also be noted that the majority of public school teachers, who were local government officials, and their major Union were (and still are to a considerable extent) socialists/communists or their sympathizers and have been ideologically and emotionally against the post-war government and the majority party.

Thus, in Japan the situation is different from most other countries. Here, the fundamental purpose of education—the nurturance of character and "kokoro" is inseparable from ideology, and in other words, education has been politicized not "via the economy" but "directly".

### The Non-Economic Nature of Educational Issues

As has been mentioned, education is often discussed together with the economy in a number of countries, but there is a strong tendency among many people in Japan to try to strictly separate the two issues. It is widely agreed throughout the world that one of the main factors behind Japan's remarkable economic growth since 1945 was its success in education. In spite of this, the Japanese have an extremely strong dislike of discussing education together with the economy. Again, this is the result of the belief that the fundamental purpose of education is the development of character and "kokoro" rather than the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Although Japan has become a highly developed and industrialized nation where people reap the benefits of economic activities, a lot of people here tend to consider things like "economics", "money" or "moneymaking activities" as base or vulgar. They also strongly dislike discussing education (a "holy" activity with the "lofty" purpose of developing character and "kokoro") in the same breath as the economy. Even more shocking to them would be to discuss something as outrageous as "the contribution of education to the economy".

The grim reality is that Japan's educational system has made a great contribution to the development of the economy, however, a number of

Japanese prefer to avoid this fact. It even follows that using certain economic-sounding words or phrases is tabooed by most Japanese education experts. In fact, for many years, the phrase "human resources" was hardly ever used or accepted by education experts, practitioners or policymakers in Japan. Another new term "human capital", which has recently been in general use by those in the education field in the West has been causing hostility among people in the same field in Japan.

Back in the early 1960's some officials in the national education authorities studied the theory of investment in education well before the university researchers, and published their results as a White Paper of the Ministry entitled "Education and the Economy". It was published at the early phase of Japan's rapid economic growth period, and in very simple terms the gist of the report was, "If more investment is made in education—the economy will improve more."

However, this report with the above simple point was met with angry criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. The so-called "left wing" criticized it as follows: "the idea of 'education for the economy' is putting education at the service of making profit for monopolistic capitalists". On the other hand, from the so-called "right wing" came the following: "education should not be put at the service of worldly things like the economy; it should be done to promote respect for traditional Japanese culture, morality and patriotism".

At a glance, the above criticisms may look totally different from each other, coming from completely different ideological camps. However, a closer look reveals a common thread among the Japanese, transcending different ideologies, that "education should be for nurturing the 'kokoro' and should not be used as a mere means for such practical purposes as economic development". The only right-left difference lies in which direction the "kokoro" of children should be guided to.

There are other examples of the tendency to dislike economic terms when education is being discussed. The use of such phrases as "demand for education", "supply of educational opportunities" or "market of learning activities" will surely stir emotional resentment of education experts. This kind of thing is likely to be seen as peculiar by Western people, particularly those in fields such as educational administration or the economics of education. In such a situation one must recall that education in Japan is something like a "religion". In the same light, discussions at Christian churches would hardly include in the agenda such topics as "supply and demand for Jesus" or "the market for soul-saving activities".

From the standpoint of government policy-making, this is a serious situation. Policies in any field should be made, considering "demand for something among the people", "existing and potential supplies", "feasibility and appropriateness of governmental interventions in the market", "priority-setting among policy options", etc. However, in policy-making in the education field in Japan, the very first part of the discussion on "demand" is already met with angry criticism, and therefore, most Japanese education officials could not help but to continue reciting vague and philosophical slogans like "more enriched kokoro" as policy goals.

## *Chapter III*

# Some Characteristics of Japanese Elementary and Secondary Education

### A. Japanese Children Lack the Ability to Think?

Before discussing the concrete characteristics of Japanese elementary and secondary education, the stereotyped and biased argument that Japanese children lack the ability to think will be analyzed in this section.

There are several misunderstandings and biases made about the common characteristics of Japanese education, and in many cases, they are made by the Japanese themselves. Although it is typical for people in a number of countries to speak highly of their own countries to foreigners, Japanese people, especially those who identify themselves as intelligent, seem to have an obsession to speak excessively badly about their country especially its education, causing great damage to its image. The most common example is that Japanese (or Japanese children) lack thinking ability and creativity due to too much memorization.

First, it should be noted that no research or statistics ever proved the stereotype of Japanese people lacking thinking and creative skills, compared to people in other countries. It may be true that Japanese children must memorize more than most other children in the world, for example, they must memorize about 2,000 Chinese characters (each having several pronunciations and meanings) before finishing compulsory education. Also, they must memorize things that are not usually taught in other countries of the world like various theories and formulas in mathematics, physics and chemistry. However, even though there is a great deal of memorization involved in Japanese education, it doesn't mean that education aimed at the enhancement of thinking ability is lacking. With regard to thinking ability, there are no statistics or research proving that the time spent on such instruction is shorter, or that the Japanese education system and method are bad, compared to other countries in the world.

How can anyone who thinks that Japanese people have inferior thinking skills explain Japan's successful economic development after 1945? Do they say that the Japanese achieved the development without thinking skills? The people who possess this stereotyped prejudice probably claim that the Japanese just adapted and used foreign ideas and techniques. However, even if this had been true, how could they have adapted these foreign ideas and technologies without considerable thinking ability?

## The Influence of a Non-Expressive Culture: Who is more childish?

Preconceptions about Japanese people may have been created and boosted by the fact that they have a non-expressive (high-context) culture. In Australia where a lot of Asian students are studying, it is often said that professors in colleges must be careful when an Asian student does not answer the professor's question asked in class. There are three possibilities to be considered by the professor: a) the student does not know the answer; b) the student does know the answer but does not know how to say it in English; and last c) the student does know the answer and also how to say it in English but does not want to say it. Even if a person doesn't express himself verbally, it may not be fair to judge that he has no mind of his own or lacks thinking ability.

The same thing can be said about Japanese behavior. The fact that it is not considered a virtue in Japan to explicitly speak one's mind is often very hard for people in the West to imagine. In general, Japanese are supposed to avoid arguments or debates, and instead, should try to "guess" what others are thinking without verbal communications. When Commodore Perry of the US Navy arrived in Japan in 1853, both the Japanese and the American sides left official reports, interestingly both saying, "they are childish." For the Americans, the Japanese seemed "childish" because they apparently weren't able to express their mind in a clear and persuasive way. On the other hand, for the Japanese, the Americans looked "childish" for openly saying whatever they were thinking, which was considered childish in Japan.

Also, for the people who live in a culture which places more importance on individuality, the group-oriented Japanese are often seen as having no mind of their own and just follow the leader or other members of the group. However, Japanese are actually using complex skills and techniques to "guess" and "let others guess" what the members of the group are thinking, avoiding harsh arguments and conflicts as well as keeping spontaneous harmony within the group. It must be easy to imagine that such a process calls for an extremely high level of intelligence and thinking skills. When foreigners cannot understand this kind of behavior and implicit efforts, they often carelessly make assumptions that Japanese people lack the ability to think.

## Nobel Prize and School Education: What's necessary for all children?

Japanese people themselves often believe that Japanese lack thinking ability. They are influenced by the above stereotyped bias among foreigners and those Japanese experts who consider it an obligation of intelligent people to speak ill of anything about their own country. As this is just a prejudice, there is no proof nor statistics, however, a lot of Japanese cite the number of Nobel Prize winners (from Japan) as evidence of a lack of intelligence and thinking skills. However, any argument attempting to make a connection between the number of Nobel Prize winners to the thinking ability of all people or children in general is ridiculous.

The most serious problem that is shown in the above argument among many Japanese to connect the number of Nobel Prize winners to the general thinking skills of the people at large is that, in the discussion on education, most Japanese are suffering from a confusion between what is needed for "all children and people" and "a limited number of experts".

As has been mentioned, Japanese elementary and secondary education systems have been run based on the egalitarian approach : "the same good things for all children", with which Japan has succeeded in raising the general intellectual level of all children and people. However, the above confusion together with this approach would surely create serious problems in the future unless "what's necessary for all children" will be clearly identified.

### Analysis of "Newsweek"

After educational reform started to be discussed seriously in the United States in the late 1980s, Newsweek dispatched research teams to various countries to look into basic/compulsory education to find out which countries the US could learn from in terms of various fields of school curricula.

They finally published a special edition with the results of their research in the early 1990's, including a series of reports/articles on the measures and practices in other countries which the US could learn from. The titles of some of the reports/articles were as follows: Learn Mathematics Education from Germany; Learn Foreign Language Education from the Netherlands; and finally, Learn Science Education from Japan.

The last article written by a Newsweek team stated that in Japan, all elementary schools had the necessary equipment according to the relevant national standards set by the government, spent sufficient amount of time on experiments, and teachers paid special attention to enhancing pupils' "scientific thinking ability". It also stated that US elementary school science classes merely handed out facts and was more memorization-oriented than Japan. These results of this research carried out by American experts appears to be the opposite of what the average Japanese and Americans thought about their own education systems.

However, it also should be noted here that the research of Newsweek seems to have been done focusing on Japanese science education at the third and/or fourth grade level of elementary school because after these grades the teaching method of science education in Japan gradually changes to a cramming nature.

## B. Fruits of "Attitude Development"

The purpose of this section is to show some examples of the practices in Japanese elementary and secondary education, which are carried out for the development of character and "kokoro". It should first be noted that in Japan, there is no curriculum or subject called "kokoro" or "character development" like there are classes in mathematics or science. As "kokoro" cannot be defined in terms of units of knowledge for learning or memorization but is related to "attitude" and "value system", the education of "kokoro" is theoretically carried out in all classes and activities at school.

## Balance among Various Subjects/Activities and "Whole-Person Education"

With a view to realizing the above, the "balance" among various subjects and activities is emphasized in Japanese elementary and secondary education. This approach for the sake of the realization of full character development is called "whole-person education" in Japan, which implies a balance among intellectual, mental, moral and physical development of children.

In Japan, the principal of each school has the responsibility for drawing up school curriculum, however, it should be based on the National Curriculum Standard prepared by the national education authorities. The national government also sets standard on how many hours should be allocated to each subject and other activities. For example, for the sixth grade of elementary schools, the standard provides for a total of 945 school hours a year, which are to be divided as follows: Japanese language (175 hours), math (150 hours), social studies (100 hours), science (95 hours), physical education (90 hours), home economics (55 hours), music (50 hours), art (50 hours), special educational activities (35 hours), moral education (35 hours) and comprehensive/cross-curricular learning (110 hours).

This shows that considerable hours are allocated not only to language, math, etc. but other subjects and activities as music, art, sports, special educational activities, etc. as compulsory and intra-curricular teaching and activities. Although there is an image shared by a number of foreigners and even the Japanese themselves that Japanese school hours for subject teaching are much longer than other countries, since school hours are allocated to a wide range of subjects and activities, school hours allotted for specific subjects are not necessarily longer than other countries. For example, the hours allotted for "math" in the sixth grade of elementary school in Japan are shorter than the average for those in the US.

In relation to the development of character and "kokoro", attention should be drawn to the "special educational activities" carried out in all 40,000 elementary and secondary schools in Japan, in which a wide range of group, cultural, sporting and other activities are planned and carried out for the "whole-person education" as a compulsory part of the curriculum.

### Developed Attitudes: Three Prominent Aspects

It is easy to say that "enriched kokoro" is important, however, what is the meaning of "enriched kokoro"? Actually, there is no clear-cut definition of "kokoro" even among Japanese people or experts, however, the following aspects/attitudes are often cited and used by educational experts as aspects involved in "enriched kokoro": respect for human and animal life, a positive attitude toward life, the search for truth, love for nature, respect for beauty and holy things, generosity and thoughts for others, feelings of gratitude, an independent spirit and self-control, contribution to public interests, working in harmony with others, keeping equality and fairness, keeping moral values, and keeping order and good manners in daily life.

The above attempt to clarify the concept of "good kokoro" shows that "education of kokoro" virtually means "attitude development". Also, it is clear that most of the above attitudes and values seem to be shared by most countries in the world as good things, indeed things which should be nurtured also at pubic school.

Among various aspects or results of the "attitude development" in Japanese schools, the following three, which have been meaningful to the economic development of the country, seem to deserve special attention:

(i) Cooperative attitude
(ii) Diligent attitude
(iii) Enterprising Spirit

What is interesting is the fact that the above three aspects are not noticed or analyzed by most Japanese education experts, who like to consider "kokoro" as something much more lofty and philosophical. Also, although such aspects of Japanese culture as "cooperative and group-oriented attitude" and "diligent and hard working culture" have often been highlighted by a number of Japanese and foreign people, there has been almost no efforts made by Japanese experts to link them to practices at school in an analytical way. In the following sub-sections, such an effort will be made.

### a. Functions of "Han": Source of Cooperative Attitudes?

The first aspect to be discussed as one of the fruits of the "attitude development" for "good kokoro" is "cooperative attitude" shared by a number of Japanese. This has been pointed out by many people in both positive and negative lights in Japanese culture, however, few people or experts in Japan ever thought of this issue as a result of practices at school.

Some foreign experts have noticed that certain activities carried out in Japanese elementary and secondary schools are contributing to the formation of such an attitude. As these activities are spontaneous, not based on the National Curriculum Standard nor other regulations, people in Japan almost never imagined a relationship between such activities in schools and the Japanese cooperative attitude.

Among the above-mentioned activities forming the cooperative attitude, one of the most meaningful ones is the so-called "han" (group) activity commonly found in Japanese elementary and secondary school education. A "han" is usually made up of 5 to 6 children in a homeroom class, and a normal homeroom class is composed of 4 to 6 hans. Pupils and students work in this group to accomplish a variety of activities.

This group activity is commonly seen during subject-based learning such as experiments in "science" classes and research (such as field work) in "social studies" classes. Each "han" appoints a "leader", however, the leaders are not necessarily the most talented or smartest pupils/students, but are usually appointed on a rotational basis every week or month so that all children may experience the leader's role and develop their ability as a leader in a group. The leader tries to keep the group going, and the members learn naturally how to work in a group by sometimes discussing, guessing what other members are thinking, extending consideration to others, helping slower children, etc.

The "han" functions much more vividly for the "special educational activities", which have already been mentioned. Apart from various academic, cultural and sporting activities, each "han" is given a role called "toh-ban". Roles of "toh-ban" include such activities as cleaning classrooms, serving school lunches, publishing class newspapers, looking after animals kept by the class, and taking care of class flower gardens.

### All Children for All Roles

An extremely important and interesting point here is that a "han" is given one of such roles (toh-ban) on a weekly or monthly basis, taking turns with other "hans" and performing all the roles and duties equally. Just like the case of the "leader" of each "han", children or a "han" with a better ability of e.g. publishing class newspaper are not necessarily given such a role continuously. From these activities children naturally learn that everyone in the group must contribute to the group in some way and, much more importantly, that everybody is equal in terms of such an obligation.

Through these group activities, Japanese children learn how to work well with others, how to help each other, how to contribute to the group, how to keep harmony and agreement among the group members, and to consider other people's feelings. Because of this, it is said that the energy needed by Japanese teachers to keep order in the classroom is relatively lower than that of teachers in many other countries. Many foreigners misjudge this situation, thinking that Japanese teachers keep order in the classroom by authoritarian methods, but this is not true. Japanese children learn to maintain order by themselves and have learned how to behave in various situations through their activities at school.

A good example of the results of the education of "kokoro" to develop "cooperative attitude", which drew a worldwide attention was the aftermath of the Kobe Earthquake in January of 1995. The people of Kobe, who had not known each other before, worked together and helped each other very well through hard times. Some members of the foreign media were surprised and enthusiastically reported the spontaneous cooperation and activities of Kobe residents, reporting almost no cases of theft, robbery, violence or rape. Since this kind of behavior is not genetic, it must be the result of certain sorts of learning, most likely from elementary and secondary education. People in the Japanese education system should be more proud of this achievement, however, almost no one has considered the relationship between the success in Kobe and practices in Japanese schools such as "classroom cleaning toh-ban" and "school lunch serving toh-ban".

Source of Uniformity?

Although the development of a cooperative attitude has generally been seen as a positive result of the relevant practices in Japanese schools, it also can be argued that the development of a cooperative attitude, at the same time, means a push to "uniformity". For example, learning how to keep order and harmony may mean forming an attitude to refrain from doing or saying anything that may be different from others in order to maintain harmony in the group. It is also often said that when Japanese parents lecture their children, it is common for them to say, "If you do that, people will laugh at you," instead of, "It is not good for you to do that."

Lately in Japan, people are starting to talk highly about emphasizing "individuality", however, no one has ever discussed the necessity to change the way how parents lecture their children. The group-oriented culture is so deeply rooted in the culture of Japanese, and therefore, if the present attempt to highlight "individuality" is done without careful consideration and assessment of possible impacts on Japanese culture, it might overturn the foundation of the nation.

### b. Belief in "Equal Potential": Source of Diligent Attitudes?

The second aspect to be discussed as one of the fruits of "attitude development" for "good kokoro" is "diligent attitude". It is believed that there must have been a number of sources of this apparently widely shared Japanese attitude, however, practices at school seem to be one of such sources.

It might be very hard to believe, but a number of Japanese believe in "equal potential" in terms of the development of children, which means that they believe, "All children equally share the same wonderful possibility and potential for the development of any ability." This argument or belief might be similar to the religious concept of "Everyone can go to heaven." This is also closely related to the basic ways Japanese people think about education.

Firstly, as stated above, the fundamental purpose of education in Japan is not the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills but the full development of character and "kokoro". This lofty idea may have misled and confused many Japanese. It might be true that all people have equal potential when it comes to the development of "kokoro", however, as for the inevitably dominant part of school education, viz. the learning of "knowledge and skills", the difference in individual ability shows up naturally. In spite of this, Japanese people believe, or want to believe that all children have "equal potential", which may mean confusion between "kokoro" and "knowledge and skills".

Secondly, this is also closely related to the idea of "equality" in education in Japan, which is more oriented toward "equality of outcome". In more concrete terms, the search for the "equality of outcome" of the Japanese seems to have derived, at least partly, from their belief in "equality of potential" among all children. Here, one may find out that there is confusion between the "ideal" and the "reality".

### Merits of the Belief in "Equal Potential"

The belief in "equal potential" has had both a positive and negative influence on Japanese school education.

The merits can be explained from the example of what happens when a child in elementary school starts to get behind in class. In such a situation, many Japanese teachers would blame themselves rather than the child, believing in "equal potential" and thinking that the problem was with their teaching. Most Japanese teachers believe in the "equal potential" of all pupils, and strive to help the child achieve the same level as the others. This attitude and behavior of Japanese teachers to make maximum efforts towards equal outcomes is the first merit of the belief in "equal potential".

The second merit of this belief is the following. Since both Japanese parents and teachers believe in "equal potential", when a child starts to get behind in school, they cheer the child on to do better, saying, "You can make it, too!" Japanese children, who are generally serious and eager to study, take in this support and work harder finally to make a difference and improvement. (However, depending on the individual's ability, the results of their efforts, i.e. effort/result ratios, are quite different among children.)

This "outcome of effort" made by the children is always highly praised by the Japanese parents and teachers, and this has been creating the so-called "Japanese effortism" among most people. In this way Japanese children internalize the idea: "Any effort will surely be rewarded in the future." Actually, in all work places the Japanese quite often use the phrase to cheer on their colleagues and themselves: "Yareba dekiru!" which means, "If you make efforts, you can achieve anything." They have not noticed, however, that this is a very Japanese attitude nor that this diligent attitude has been formed, at least to some extent, by the belief of "equal potential".

### Demerits of the Belief in "Equal Potential"

As to the demerits of this belief in "equal potential", the first demerit is that no matter how much effort parents, teachers and children themselves may make, there will always be a difference among individuals in "knowledge and skills". Facing such reality, since Japanese parents believe in "equal potential", they tend to blame the child and/or the teacher for not putting in enough effort. This means that the belief in "equal potential" and the goal of "equality of outcome" are putting a lot of pressure on children and teachers, and this pressure is one of the reasons for the increasing number of children refusing to attend school or, in the worst cases, suicide. The gap between the ideal and the reality is very hard to fill, however, presently the extraordinary efforts of teachers and private preparatory schools (juku) are partially filling the gap.

The second demerit of the belief in "equal potential" is the problem of, i.e. refusal to accept "ability-based" differentiated class arrangements in Japanese schools. Since parents believe in "equal potential" of their children, they are always against any idea of differentiated classes proposed by local education boards or schools for the sake of better treatments to all children according to different abilities. The national education authorities of Japan once proposed the introduction of "ability-based" classes, however, they were shut down by the overwhelming opposition by parents. For parents in Japan, who believed in "equal potential", the concept of "ability-based" was something that should not exist, and if the difference among children apparently existed it must be considered as "a result of inappropriate education".

However, similar arrangements are made in an increasing number of schools in Japan; they are presently called differentiated class arrangements based on "achievement levels". The idea is that each child has the same potential ability, but their level of "achievement" at a given time may differ due to some unknown reasons. If Japanese people continue to avoid reality by using this kind of rhetoric, the fundamental problem will never be resolved.

### c. Enterprising Spirit: Source of Technological Development?

The third aspect to be discussed as one of the fruits of the "attitude development" for "good kokoro" is the formation of so-called "enterprising spirit". Although Japanese people always highlight such philosophical and spiritual aspects as "caring for others", "love for nature and life", "a spirit of gratitude", "the value of truth", etc. their approach to education to emphasize "kokoro" and attitude has also been contributing to the economic development of this country. Japanese education experts are not aware of the relationship between education of "kokoro", which they like, and the economy, which they hate, however, as stated earlier, education of "kokoro", which can also be called "attitude development", has been contributing a lot to the economy of Japan by forming such attitudes among people as "cooperative attitude" and "diligent attitude".

Another presumably more significant aspect that should be discussed here is the "enterprising spirit". Until the 1990s, researchers of education policies in developed countries were unsure as to why the economies of Japan and Germany had been so successful. As education policy experts, they shared the hypothesis that countries with good education systems must have robust economies, however, in one sense Japan and Germany had totally opposite education systems. In Japan, emphasis was placed on equality where more than 90% of each age group graduate from high schools with university/college entrance qualification. On the other hand, in Germany streaming started at the junior high level.

Within the framework of a comparative research project of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), European researchers and experts thought that there must be some common "good attitudes" developed in both Japan and Germany through daily activities in schools, which had nothing to do with their official curricula or education systems. Among such anticipated and imagined "good attitudes", the attitude "to positively take in new things and ideas and try to use them for development and breakthrough" was called "enterprising spirit" by these researchers and experts.

The project of the OECD, covering not only Japan and Germany but all the other Member countries, did not really mark a big success as such an attitude was closely related to culture at large and was extremely difficult to analyze by a commonly shared method. However, the development of the "enterprising spirit" was and still is carried out in Japanese elementary and secondary schools institutionally, if not intentionally.

### Is Japan a Small and Vulnerable Country?

A clear and simple example of this is that Japanese teachers plant the idea of Japan as "a small and weak nation" in the minds of their children without any guidelines such as the National Curriculum Standard. They simply and naturally believe so, and they think that they should tell it to children.

Most G7 or OECD member countries teach their children to have pride in their own country by emphasizing their country's strengths in such areas as the economy and industry, size and population, culture and tradition, natural resources, art, science and technology, history and/or military power. However, in Japan, pupils and students are frequently taught that Japan is a very small and vulnerable country, and can be blown away with a single breath.

Therefore, it is said by a number of European administrators in international organizations that most of the writings coming from the Japanese government on any issues related to international relations start with a phrase like:

> "International relations are extremely important and crucial to Japan, which is a very small country with almost no natural resources, and therefore, ......"

After this "therefore," comes trade, student exchange, cultural exchange, cooperation in science and technology, etc., depending on the issue to be discussed in the paper.

Europeans are always puzzled by such an expression, since they do not see Japan as a "small country". Looking at Japan in terms of size, only a couple of countries are bigger than Japan in Europe. Also, as for population, Japan has more people than Germany, which is also bigger than the aggregate of the UK and France. If Japan had been located next to the UK, it would have been considered a threat to the European continent throughout history. Therefore, Europeans wonder why Japanese people stress the idea that they are "a small and vulnerable nation".

However, this way of thinking, even if it is a misunderstanding or obsession, has worked wonders for Japan's economic development after the WWII. The instilling of a vague sense of anxiety and uneasiness about the future of the country has caused Japanese people to naturally think that they should work hard, develop science and technology, positively make use of new technologies for production, and promote trade by technology-based industries so that this small and vulnerable country with few resources may survive and continue development in the future.

Because of this, technology seems to have become a kind of "ideology" for the Japanese in a positive sense. In some countries, people seem to have started to think that technology itself may be evil due to its various negative impacts on the world. However, this cannot be said for Japan since Japanese people seem to believe in the idea that negative effects caused by new technologies can surely be overcome by newer and more developed technologies to cope with them.

## C. Some Problems for Policy-Making and Reform

As has been discussed before, elementary and secondary education in Japan has contributed to the economic development of the country mainly through the various "attitude development" approaches and activities (which derived from education of "kokoro"), rather than a high level of math or science education. However, if the Japanese education system should be further developed and reformed to cope with the on-going social and economic changes, there is a serious problem with the present situation.

### Causes, Results and Relationship

This problem, which is very simple but serious, is that Japanese people including education experts are not aware of the relevant "causes" (practices in schools and their significance), "results" (effects of such practices in schools including developed "attitudes") or their "relationship".

Firstly, as for the "causes", although a number of people use the phrase "education of kokoro" as a slogan, few people know that this approach is a unique one among developed countries. Moreover, few people have noticed the significance of activities like "han" and "toh-ban" activities, which are not carried out based on the National Curriculum Standard but according to the culture of Japan. A surprising fact is that, although the national education authorities always emphasize the importance of the education of "kokoro", the list of educational policies and measures prepared by them shows only a couple of concrete measures for this purpose such as teacher training for counseling. This means that Japanese people and experts are almost always paying attention to the content of what's written (in such documents as the National Curriculum Standard or government guidelines) rather than what's actually done in school.

Secondly, as for the "results", most Japanese experts, when they discuss the quality and outcomes of education, only deal with issues such as the level and standard of math, science, foreign languages, etc. without paying due attention to the value and fruits of "attitude development". It is strange that these people, who are always demanding more and better education of "kokoro", have scarcely discussed the concrete outcomes of this approach i.e. "attitudes" developed through the kokoro-related activities. "Attitude development" can be a concept which bridges the lofty "kokoro" world of the Japanese and the practical world of educational outcomes, however, it seems that a number of Japanese would like to clearly divide the two. Also, the great contribution of the natural and spontaneous practices in Japanese schools (not based on the National Curriculum Standard but culture) to the economy through the development of the above-mentioned three attitudes has almost never drawn the attention of the Japanese experts.

Thirdly, as for the "relationship" between the "causes" and the "results", viz. between the practices in schools and their contribution, an extremely serious problem in Japan is that the Japanese have not noticed that a number of the positive aspects of Japan's elementary and secondary education are not the results of intentional planning or "policy" but in fact stem from Japanese "culture".

### It's not the Policy but the Culture that Brought Success.

The above third point seems to be very serious. It also means that Japanese people do not know what part of their educational practices is actually contributing to what. Therefore, one could say in a cynical way that if elementary and secondary education of Japan has contributed to its economic development, it is not the education policy that worked but the culture of Japan, which just happened to positively fit the past economic situation. As to the problem of the relationship between education and the economy, in a number of other countries it is that education does not seem to be contributing sufficiently to the economy. On the other hand, in Japan the problem is rather that education has been significantly contributing to the economy, however, people in Japan do not know which part of their education is working for economic development.

This will be an extremely serious problem when Japan has to institute educational reform in relation to changes in its society and economy (as is happening right now). Without knowing the relationship between the causes (practices) and the results, it would be impossible to form any mission-oriented policy or constructive education reform policy packages. The fact that the Japanese are not fully aware of "which part contributed to what" means, at the same time, that they do not know "which part should be changed for which purpose".

For example, although it is said that the energy needed for Japanese teachers to keep their classrooms in control is comparatively lower than in many other countries, as stated before, an increasing number of teachers now face serious problems in classroom management for some reasons. A number of education experts in Japan, facing such problems, are shocked and are at a loss. They seem to be unable to find effective solutions partly because they do not know or have not analyzed why

Japanese teachers needed less energy before.

Another problem is occurring in terms of the "special educational activities". The Japanese school system is put in a position where they need to cut back the number of school hours because all Saturdays are to be phased out as a school day, starting from fiscal 2002. As explained earlier, a very important part of Japanese elementary and secondary education are these "special educational activities" that are carried out as a compulsory part of the curriculum outside academic teaching. However, facing the necessity to cut school hours, without fully knowing the extremely high value of these activities, a number of schools are now decreasing the school hours shared for these activities in order to keep time for math, science, etc. This may be a kind of cultural/educational "suicide" in the future.

### Impossibility of Overseas Transfer as a Policy Package

This problem impedes not only effective educational reforms in Japan but also Japan's possible contribution and aid to other countries, because, without knowing the relationship between the causes and results or having a clear mission-oriented policy framework, it is virtually impossible for other countries to make use of Japanese experiences.

A couple of decades ago, there was actually a case where a developing country, which was extremely rich in natural resources and competitive in national income compared with then developed countries, sent a fact-finding mission to Japan to learn from its experiences. As this country was too rich and the people there seemed to have lost much of their diligence and their hard working attitude, the Government of the country had serious concerns about the future.

Hearing that the Japanese were diligent, they thought that it must be the result of education and learning, probably school education. The representatives of the Government of that country visited the national education authorities of Japan to learn what kinds of activities were done in Japanese elementary and secondary schools in order to develop diligence.

Unfortunately, the answer from the Japanese side was, "Nothing". This meant that there was nothing written in the National Curriculum Standard for this purpose, and therefore, the national education authorities themselves had not noticed the effects and values of the relevant approaches, ways of thinking and practices in schools. What the representatives on the mission wanted was of course totally different from what's officially written in the National Curriculum Standard, however, they could not obtain useful information. This way, although the success of Japanese school education is well known in other countries, it is usually by no means transferable because it is not necessarily the results of intentional plans or policies and hardly ever noticed/analyzed by the Japanese themselves.

## *Chapter IV*

# Some Characteristics of Japanese Higher Education

### A. Lower Quality Higher Education?

Before entering into a concrete discussion of the characteristics of higher education in Japan, first let's examine what is behind the title of this section: "Is Japan's higher education really of low quality?"

Japanese primary and secondary education enjoys a relatively good reputation both in Japan and abroad. Even the self-flagellating Japanese critics, whose mantra is, "Japanese education is bad," seem to have a certain pride in the high level of primary and secondary education in Japan such as math and science. (However, as was mentioned before, the quality of elementary and secondary education is quite high in areas where these critics are not paying due attention, i.e. attitude development, rather than what they are proud of, i.e. math, science, etc.)

In the midst of all the kudos for Japanese basic education, the higher education sector is left out. There seems to be a general consensus that the quality of higher education is low in Japan, and this consensus is not only from outside the country but also from within. Generally, Japanese people think that higher education in their own country is substandard. Peculiarly enough, this does not seem to disturb the university professors in Japan, who rarely attempt to rebut such criticism, however, are normally not in favor of any drastic reforms.

#### Counterargument Made by Overseas Experts

However, there are some foreign experts who have come to the defense of Japan's higher education. At the beginning of the 1990's, when the Japanese and US national education authorities formed joint and reciprocal research teams in a large project to jointly study each others' education systems, the US team produced a report on the Japanese systems. It showed the usual stereotyped view, in short: "Japan's elementary and secondary education were good but higher education was bad." Looking at this report, an American scholar made the following thoughtful rebuttal to it.

> There are various educational opportunities in every country and these cover the entire life span of all people. They include education in home, early childhood education, elementary, secondary and higher education, adult education, enterprise-based education/training, and others. The functions of these different kinds of education are not exactly the same due to differences in the social, cultural and economic background of each country. In other words, it is quite normal to expect Japanese universities to have different functions from those of the US universities. It is, therefore, clearly unfair to judge the quality of Japanese universities according to the functions of US universities in the US.

This seems quite a reasonable argument. The quality of Japan's higher educational institutions should be evaluated according to the level to which they are carrying out their expected functions within Japan. In fact, due to differences in social and economic background, the expected functions of Japanese higher education appear to be quite different from those of many other countries.

## Three Aspects of the Specific Background in Japan

Three examples of such socially and economically based differences are summarized as follows.

Firstly, both the educational standards and the distribution of educational opportunities are very good for elementary and secondary education in Japan. The advancement rate from lower-secondary school (junior high school) to upper-secondary school (high school) has surpassed 98%, and because the high school (3 years) dropout rate stands at only about 6% for the three years, the percentage of students who are qualified to enter higher education is the highest in the world at more than 90%. Furthermore, high school education standards and the academic achievement level of the nation's students as a whole are very high. It, therefore, follows that Japanese employers can expect almost every young person to have a relatively high academic level, compared to other countries.

Secondly, there is a tradition for small-, medium- and large-sized companies in Japan to strongly encourage (often compel) continuing education and training for their employees. As for on-the-job and off-the-job education and training, industries and companies in Japan have developed highly sophisticated enterprise-based (not necessarily "in-house") systems. Most of these training programs stress not only practical skills needed for the job but also spiritual or mental aspects, and in a country with a tradition of emphasis on the group, there is a strong tendency to "infuse" the employees with loyalty and the company's own brand of values using these training systems.

Thirdly, Japanese employers tend to avoid recruiting specialists in a particular field. This may have been related to the Chinese tradition to prefer generalists to specialists, and this way of preferring generalists to specialists also holds true for the Japanese labor market. Even when companies employ new researchers or engineers for research-related areas they are much more likely to choose candidates with a Masters degree (who they believe will be more flexible and able to carry out applied research) over ones with a highly specialized Doctorate (who they believe are more narrow-minded with less flexibility). This tendency may have been related to when the technological strategy of many Japanese companies was mainly the import and application/refinement of foreign technologies.

With this background, it follows that Japanese employers differ from those in many other countries; they do not demand the universities to train high level specialists and they do not recruit fresh graduates on the basis of their "immediate battle readiness". What they do want from the universities is first of all the screening by the universities' entrance examination systems, through which young people's high school achievement level and general intelligence are evaluated.

Japanese employers also want the university to supply them with unspoiled, fresh graduates educated with a wide but not necessarily deep knowledge base, who are cultured, flexible, co-operative and who can adapt themselves well to the workplace. All of these characteristics are in fact fundamental requirements for enterprise-based education and training.

### Changes in Demand Caused by Economic Problems

In the wake of social and economic changes such as the long-term economic slump and the need for more technological innovation, the economic situation of Japan is drastically changing and the industrial sector has begun to say loudly that higher education in Japan is inadequate and universities and colleges should be reformed to provide better quality graduates.

Within Japan such criticisms are often based on easy and unfair comparisons between US and Japanese universities. A fairer perspective should require the industrial sector to first compare the US and Japanese labor markets, reform the rigid labor market system in Japan and create a system for on-demand evaluation of possible employees' abilities so that students naturally want to develop their abilities in the university, which will be fairly evaluated in the labor market. Most Japanese students in the humanities and social sciences do not expect universities to teach them specific skills simply because they know that the labor market rarely evaluates such skills directly but largely relies on the "name" of the university/college. Presently there is little such "demand" from students towards the universities just because there is little such "demand" from employers towards new graduates, and this is why they do not study (or actually, do not have to study) as American students do. A number of people in Japan say that Japanese college students in humanities and social sciences have problems of "attitude" (to study hard), however, the real cause of this problem is the labor market system.

Coming back to the recent demands by industry, it is interesting to note that the university sector has spent little energy rebutting this seemingly unfair criticism. One reason for judging it as unfair is the fact that these are only very general and emotional demands (attacks). Many companies just one-sidedly criticize or complain repeatedly in the abstract ("University education is no good." or "They should send us better graduates.") instead of telling the universities which particular skills and abilities they want taught.

In all fairness, the universities can hardly be expected to respond to such vague and non-specific demands or complaints. They may rather have to start by asking some fundamental questions such as: "Who needs which skills?"; "If these skills are taught, who is going to evaluate them and how?"; and "Does the labor market have the will and the ability to make fair evaluations?"

With these background factors in mind Japan's higher education should not be thought of so negatively. Moreover, regardless of whether Japan's present higher educational system will be adequate to cope with the future, it should be mentioned that since 1945, this system has done a relatively good job of functioning and dealing with the special needs generated by Japan's unique social and economic background, if not accomplishing more or less what US universities are doing in the US.

How in the world could a country with a low quality higher educational system carry out an economic development like Japan? How in the world could anyone with any measure of common sense say that there is no relation between Japan's economic development and its higher educational system?

## B. Positive Features of Japanese Higher Education System

As described in the previous section, the reputation of Japanese universities and colleges is miserably low, however, such criticisms are not always fair. One important point here is to distinguish between functions of higher education system as a whole and those of individual higher education institutions. As to the latter, namely the curriculum structure, teaching method, etc., it is a widely shared opinion that the practices of individual Japanese higher education institutions are not good in general. This may be true, however, as mentioned before, this has occurred because of little demand from the labor market.

On the other hand, as to the system as a whole, it has been argued by some Japanese and many overseas experts that the Japanese higher education system seems to have at least some positive characteristics and features. The purpose of this section is to take up some of these positive features.

## a. Large Supply of Graduates

The first positive feature of the Japanese higher education system as a whole is the large supply of graduates.

More than 90% of each age cohort graduates from high school with university/college entrance qualification in Japan, and the advancement rate of Japanese high school graduates to higher education is more than 40%. This means that the labor market annually absorbed some 500,000 graduates from higher education institutions. Out of this figure, approximately 100,000 (20%) were from engineering departments. This figure is greater (albeit slightly) than the annual number of engineering graduates in the US. With the population of Japan only half that of the US, a comparison would show Japan having double the per capita number of engineering graduates. There is probably no one foolish enough to think that this produced no effect on Japan's economic development in the past.

These graduates of engineering and other fields have saturated every area of the nation's economy but with such a huge supply, it is impossible for all of them to get placed in big corporations. Many graduates, therefore, actually find positions in small- or medium-sized companies and have become a major strong point of Japan's economy.

The actual contents of Japan's higher education, especially the humanities and social sciences, have been called "lacking in specialization". However, even so, the fact that there are so many new employees entering small- and medium-sized companies with college level intelligence and ability is a very important characteristic in comparison with other countries.

These young people have been brought up through their elementary and secondary education to have an "enterprising spirit", which was discussed in the previous chapter, and educated to believe that Japan, which is a small and vulnerable country with few natural resources, must always develop and adapt new technology and open new markets in the world to survive.

## b. Emphasis on Practical Fields

The second positive feature of the Japanese higher education system as a whole is the emphasis on practical fields: "pragmatism" in higher education in a sense.

Old traditional European universities (i.e. "universities" in the original and real sense) seem to have been created originally for the purpose of the "pure academics" and had a tradition of concentrating on the "humanities". Therefore, it is often said that, for a very long time these European universities were not positive about professional or technical education for practical fields such as law (to train lawyers), medicine (to train doctors), education (to train teachers) or engineering (to train engineers).

In contrast, Japan's higher education system was made "artificially" after the Meiji Revolution in 1868 with a clear mission: "to catch up with the Western countries" through "the development of high level human resources and research" mainly in the fields which would contribute to the nation's modernization. Therefore, there was no romantic attitude among Japanese people toward the universities, and there were no taboos about including practical fields of study in Japan's universities.

It is quite interesting to note that, on the one hand, in some European countries people believe that elementary and secondary education should be practical and higher education should be more for the humanities, and on the other hand, in Japan a number of people think that elementary and secondary education should be for "kokoro" rather than practical things and higher education should be practical for human resource development and technology.

More than 100 years ago, during the Meiji era, the government of Japan, unfettered by the traditional European taboos, conceived of a higher education system with a pragmatic attitude of "whatever is useful can be taught at university". The results of these efforts was the world's first "Department of Engineering" established at a four-year university now known as the University of Tokyo. Some say that the world's first Agriculture Department and Commerce Department were also established in Japanese universities, however, this depends on the definition of "department" and "university".

This emphasis on practical fields of study, especially the concentration on engineering has continued up to the present day. Engineering graduates make up some 20% of the total number of annual graduates and the corresponding figure is more than 30% for Japanese national universities. The status and position of engineering-related departments and scholars in Japanese universities and academic societies are also remarkably high by European standards.

In Western Europe a number of countries suffered from a dearth of engineering students in the 1980's. In order to fill the quotas of engineering departments, in some countries PR groups composed of industry people and education officials made the rounds of the high schools with promotional videos and other materials lauding the fruits of technology and extolling the benefits of a career in engineering to recruit more high school students to study engineering.

Such efforts are hardly needed in Japan. Here one can also find a drop in the number of applicants (high school students) to engineering courses, and a number of people are arguing that this is an extremely serious problem for the future of the nation. Some also criticize that this is the result of bad "kokoro" education for children (again!), which according to them neglects an "attitude" of respect for "making things".

However, actually most universities and colleges still have no trouble fulfilling engineering course student quotas, and what's actually happening is merely a decrease in applicants. This occasional public outcry when there is a small drop in the number of applicants to engineering courses rather implies that the belief in technology among the Japanese is almost boundless.

Most Japanese have an aversion to any government policies targeting the contents or fields of university education, however, when these policies are to prevent decline in engineering and technology applicants, there is a solid consensus behind it. Moreover, it is surprising that university professors, who are usually against any governmental intervention to universities, seem to be supporting such policies. Also, what is more surprising is that university professors in the humanities and social sciences are not usually against such policies.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, technology seems to have become a kind of "ideology" for the Japanese.

### c. Flexibility of the Overall System

The third positive feature of the Japanese higher education system as a whole is the flexibility of the overall system, and the following three factors seem to be supporting this flexibility.

#### Strength of Private Higher Education Institutions

Firstly, in Japan some 80% of all university/college students are enrolled in private institutions of higher education. This concept of "private higher education" is not always easy to grasp for people from countries where higher education is almost exclusively a public function. Some people from countries where some private higher education institutions are found but are mainly religion-related, misunderstand that Japan's private universities and colleges must be Buddhist-affiliated. Japan's private universities and colleges are also quite different in character from their counterparts in North American where such private institutions are commonly found. In many cases, private institutions in North America were created from the "bottom-up", being the result of a community effort.

On the other hand, since the Meiji era, a number of Japan's traditional private colleges were built from the "top-down", which does not mean from government initiatives but rather based on the ideals of a charismatic founder who loved education, wanted young people to follow the founding ideals and had a strong will to help Japan catch up to the West to keep it from being overrun by hostile foreign powers. Many of the founders of these famous traditional private universities, such as Keio University and Waseda University, were men out of powerful government positions, and more importantly, many of them had an anti-government mentality.

Western Europe was a place where the university traditionally used to be "a publicly funded institution for the education of a small elite group of future national leaders", and for many years, education experts there were strongly against a university system like Japan's with its dependence on private educational institutions. This viewpoint was frequently expressed in international conferences, and was largely based on the fear of budget cuts due to privatization. However, in the latter half of the 1980's, when the economy of Japan was enjoying a boom, some European experts began to stand up and take notice of Japan's higher education system as witnessed by comments like: "Japan's private university system has made a significant contribution to the development of the economy."

This positive appraisal of Japan's private universities may have been correct at least to some extent. Japan's private higher education can be called a kind of "industry", and each institution must make maximum efforts to win in the "first market", which is comprised of prospective college entrants and the university side, by attracting high school students and parents, who pay the expensive tuition fees, as well as in the "second market" (i.e. labor market), which is comprised of their graduates and the nation's employers, by attracting employers to their graduates.

In this way, because Japan's private universities are highly sensitive (like industry and enterprises) to social and economic movements or changes, they have contributed to making the overall higher educational system more flexible to social changes.

### Dominance of Humanities and Social Sciences and Lack of Specialization

Secondly, approximately two thirds of Japan's entire undergraduate population can be broadly classified as enrolled in humanities and social sciences courses. This dominance is not so unusual compared to other countries, but a major difference is that for Japan, undergraduate education in fields such as humanities and social sciences is not highly specialized in each field.

Surprisingly, this is true also for such fields as law, economics and management, which should be for "professional" education. It is, therefore, said that undergraduate studies in these fields in Japanese universities are more like "general education with a focus on law", "general education with a focus on economics", etc. Only a limited number of students in these fields are planning to tackle the extremely difficult Japanese State Law Examination (bar exam) or CPA exams.

For many years this situation was pointed out as one of the weaknesses of Japanese higher education, however, it is recently seen as one of its benefits. This lack of specialization of college graduates makes it possible for them to enter a very wide range of different jobs thus contributing to the overall system's flexibility to cope with changes in the labor market. It goes without saying that there are background factors such as the special nature of Japan's labor market and the excellence of enterprise-based education and training programs which makes this cooperation possible.

### Hierarchical Structure

Thirdly, unlike in some countries in Europe, where universities generally have or are expected to have a similar level of quality (each probably with stronger and weaker fields depending on the institution or course tough), Japan's universities and colleges form a clear hierarchical structure like a pyramid.

With the very large number of institutions of higher education (there are about 600 four-year universities and colleges plus another some 600 two- or three-year junior colleges) it comes as no surprise that there are vast differences in quality, reputation and prestige among them. This kind of situation also exists in some other countries, however, the following three points are characteristics of Japan's hierarchical higher education system.

Firstly, there is no fixed formal system to categorize or rank four-year institutions into such groups as universities, colleges and polytechnics; all four-year institutions can attain higher prestige, depending on their efforts at improvement. Secondly, differences between such institutions in Japan can be seen as gradual and not discontinuous. Thirdly, there is a tendency for Japan's universities to try to gain comprehensive status, viz. establish and maintain a "full-set" of undergraduate courses and graduate schools, medical centers, etc. rather than putting emphasis on a particular specialty.

Therefore, universities and colleges in Japan always strive towards the peak of the pyramid, to get closer to the University of Tokyo, Keio University, Waseda University, etc. This sometimes causes negative effects but when universities do their best to flexibly cope with social and economic changes, the results can be said to be positive.

### d. University/Industry Relations

The final thing that needs to be mentioned about the Japanese higher education system is cooperation between the universities and industry.

Foreign observers, when looking for signs of university-industry cooperation, might judge such cooperation to be insufficient. Some of them pay attention to such tangible things on the surface as "technology licensing schemes" or "industrial liaison offices". However, they have often failed to see behind the scenes in Japan, for example, the extensive alumni networks formed between certain universities and industry. In actuality, Japan has the foundation for a very smooth functioning of university-industry cooperation, that is, a very good system of spontaneous "role sharing" between the universities and industry.

University professors in Japan, who are usually really academic-oriented, are in many cases not obsessed with or interested in moneymaking, and it is people from the industrial world who are always on the lookout for fresh new ideas to be applied. The factors behind this kind of cooperation on industry's side are: the success of instilling young people with the previously mentioned "enterprising spirit" naturally developed at elementary and secondary schools and the fact that the Japanese higher education system annually supplies large numbers of graduates, especially engineering graduates, to all sectors of the economy including small- and medium-sized companies

An excellent example of this kind of positive cooperation happened some 30 years ago. A professor at a Japanese university invented a new type of "shape-memory alloy". Wire made of this alloy can "memorize" shape when treated at certain fixed temperature and, even after being distorted, it can recover its original shape when "sensing" another fixed temperature.

About a month later all automobile companies in Japan had a sample of this alloy and started their application research. The idea was to develop parts of the car body which could rebound to their original shape after being dented by a small accident simply by applying hot water. Unfortunately, due to the very high costs involved and the problem that the alloy could not be made into sheet but just wire, this has not reached production stage. However, as a number of industrial sectors were engaged in similar research, a successful application of this discovery was made in quite a different sector. A ladies' apparel company hit upon the idea to put short wires of this alloy into brassieres, which would recover their original idealistic shape via body heat after being washed. With a great success of this idea, now it's a widely found practice among apparel makers at least in Japan to use wire of this alloy in various types of clothes.

The "brassiere" application was certainly one that the professor would never have even dreamt about, and this, of course, is a function that should be carried out by the industry side. When the "producers of knowledge" earnestly turn out good ideas and when the "producers of goods" earnestly think of ways to apply these ideas, then one can be insured of a very strong foundation of university-industry cooperation (but this to be fully achieved depends on university reforms in the quality of research).

According to a report on the issue of "education and the economy" published by the OECD, Japan was the only developed nation where the industrial world's stance towards university research was the expectation of "basic research" for new knowledge to be applied by industry rather than taking over "application and development".

Whether this foundation will continue to thrive or not depends on whether Japanese elementary and secondary education can continue to foster an "enterprising spirit" in their children, who must carry on this function in the industry of the future. However, it needs to be stressed again that the development of the "enterprising spirit" is not a result of intentional education policies.

## C. Some Problems for Reform

### a. Admission System Affecting Elementary/Secondary Education

Education in Japan carried out in home, kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, higher education institutions, companies and firms, etc. is relatively good or, in some aspects, very good, compared to many other countries. Then, why are there so many serious problems with education and children? One argument often made by some Japanese experts is that it is because of "transition problems" or "screening problems", which means the problems resulting from the movement/advancement of students from one system to another, e.g. from high school to university, from university to labor market, etc.

University Entrance Exam System as a "Transition/Screening" Problem

A Japanese expert, who used to be a senior curriculum specialist with the government explained this problem by the following metaphor. He said, "The Japanese educational system is like a well maintained railway station with a dirty ticket gate. The square in front of the station is well kept with blooming flowers and the platform of the station is also well maintained. However, since the ticket gate is dirty, children who go through it end up a mess."

Among these transition or screening problems, the two most serious ones are the labor market for new graduates, which will be explained in the following chapter, and the university/college entrance examination system. In Japan, each university/college measures their applicants' high school curriculum achievement level. (Each university creates questions for their own examinations based on the National Curriculum Standard, holds entrance exams on their campus, and also grades the exams.) The bad points about this system are that there are almost no experts on the high school education curricula at universities, and many tricky questions are made just to reduce the number of applicants.

High school students are putting a lot of energy and efforts to prepare for such exams that are different for each university rather than to follow regular classroom teaching. Also, most of them go to specialized preparatory schools just to learn the techniques to answer to such tricky questions. The national education authorities have established a center for common examination to be used by universities and colleges as the first stage of the selection, however, the use of this examination is still limited especially among private universities and colleges. More importantly, the center belongs to the nation's higher education system and is not really a third party organization.

### Serious Problem to Ruin All Reform Efforts

It is a great mystery why people involved in high school education (students, teachers, principals, local education boards and parents) are not loudly complaining about this ridiculous system. The teachers in Japanese high schools have teaching licenses and teach students based on the National Curriculum Standard and governmentally checked textbooks. However, when their students take university entrance examinations, the university professors, who do not have teaching licenses nor understanding of high school curricula and textbooks, namely "amateurs" of high school education, come out and measure the achievement level of high school students.

This is why it is often argued (mainly by foreign experts) that almost all the reform efforts for elementary and secondary education in Japan, such as reduction of teaching contents, development of teaching methods, expansion of teacher training, improvement of equipment and materials, etc., have been invalidated by this strange university/college entrance examination system. For example, even if the curriculum is cut back to reduce pressure on children, if today's screening process still exists, children (and parents) will still fiercely compete with others within this reduced curriculum by attending cram and/or preparatory schools. Moreover, since high school students must put much more energy to prepare for the tricky entrance exams rather than to follow regular classroom teaching, any effort or reform for the latter cannot be relevant to the real problems of many high school students.

The university/college entrance system is considered in Japan as a part of university "autonomy" and therefore, it is a widespread interpretation that the government cannot deprive each university of the right to independently prepare entrance examinations. However, without touching upon this extremely serious problem, any reform effort at elementary and secondary level will surely be ruined by this system.

## b. Problems of Institutional Management System

The analysis in this chapter is, as has been mentioned, on the "system" of higher education in Japan as a whole, and therefore, the flexibility of the whole "system" does not necessarily mean that of individual professors, their departments or each university.

It is true that each university in Japan is facing a necessity to reform their structure, function, curricula, teaching methods, etc. with a view to coping with the on-going social and economic changes, especially the decline in 18-year-old population. The population of the 18-year-old cohort is projected to decrease from 1992 (2 million) to 2009 (1.2 million): a 40% decrease in only 17 years, and naturally this is greatly affecting a number of institutions.

### Triad of Complaints

Facing the necessity of institutional reform, however, those engaged in higher education in Japan have some problems to tackle. For example, the national education authorities (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) often complain that there should be more leadership by the Presidents of the universities for further reform; the Presidents often say that faculties are not cooperative for any reform; and the faculty members (professors) always complain that the Ministry's regulation is too strong and detailed, and they cannot do anything new at all.

The second point above, i.e. the relation between the President and faculties, may need some explanation. In Japan, according to a provision in the Formal Education Law, the faculty meeting of each department of a university/college has extremely strong decision-making powers, and even the President cannot usually control such decision-making.

Moreover, in many cases, (not based on any particular law or regulation but just because of the culture) the decisions of faculty meeting must be unanimous. This means that any effort or proposal for reform initiated by the President can easily become stuck because every single professor has the power to veto.

### Wave of Deregulation

A significant action to cope with this unfortunate triad first came from the national education authorities. The Ministry has been taking drastic measures to abolish a number of regulations to facilitate institutional reform. Now any university or college can make decisions on almost anything about its management and activities except for, of course, the amount of public resources allocated to it. Therefore, almost all complaints expressed by professors regarding "too strong and detailed regulations by the Ministry" are now based largely on their misunderstandings or ignorance.

University professors often suffer from a confusion between governmental regulations and governmental fund allocation, and call both of them "regulations". However, the so-called "deregulation" of the latter, which they often claim for, simply means a demand for "unlimited allocation of public resources".

As the Ministry is abolishing most of these regulations, it is becoming more and more difficult for university professors to attribute the slow pace of reform to the existence of such regulations.

### Attitude or System

A number of Japanese, looking at insufficient institutional reforms within universities and colleges, blame the negative "attitude" of professors and/or Presidents. However, it seems that there should be a more system-oriented approach to foster such institutional reform.

For example, as to the above-mentioned relation between the President and departments (faculty meetings), a number of people are criticizing the "attitudes" of the professors and/or the Presidents, however, this is more a problem of "system". The President is not authorized to control the faculties or departments, and therefore, both the decision-making mandate and the responsibility for the results become vague in this strange managerial structure.

Similar problems of mandate and responsibility can be found in many organizations in Japan from schools to business and politics. Just like those other fields and areas, the future success of institutional reform in Japanese universities and colleges seems to be largely dependent on the possible restructuring of management systems, i.e. the institutional system for decision-making and responsibility.

## *Chapter V*

# Lifelong Learning Movement in Japan

Through the past two decades, "lifelong learning" has been one of the major watchwords frequently used in discussions and campaigns for educational reform in Japan. However, the movement towards a "lifelong learning society" is somewhat different from those in many other countries, and such uniqueness seems to be related to the Japanese way of thinking about education and learning as well as the peculiar Japanese labor market system.

## A. Japanese Approach to Lifelong Learning: Three Reasons to Pursue It

Lifelong learning has been promoted by the national and local education authorities in Japan in order to cope with the following three necessities:

(1) the necessity to overcome the "diploma-oriented society";
(2) the necessity to provide leisure-oriented learning opportunities for the growing demand caused by the maturing of the society; and
(3) the necessity to continue learning to cope with social, economic and technological changes.

### a. Overcoming the "Diploma-Oriented Society"

This first reason to pursue a lifelong learning society seems to be unique. The promotion of lifelong learning in Japan was started mainly to mitigate the over-enthusiasm and overestimation among Japanese people towards diplomas of initial formal education, i.e. the overemphasis on "names" of the universities and colleges. This situation is called "diploma-oriented society", and in order to cope with this serious problem, the promotion of continuing learning after initial education and, more importantly, the appreciation and proper evaluation of the outcomes of such learning have been emphasized.

### Result of a Peculiar Labor Market System for New Graduates: "Long-term Employment" and "Simultaneous Recruitment"

Although most Japanese people believe that these are problems of education systems and/or "attitudes" of people, actually they stem from the peculiar labor market system for new graduates in Japan. The majority of new graduates of high schools and universities/colleges in Japan are employed on a long-term basis as well as by the "simultaneous recruitment system for new graduates". Almost all new graduates of high school and universities/colleges graduate from such institutions on March 31, which is the last day of Japanese fiscal/academic year. Surprisingly, they all should be employed on the very next day: April 1, which is the first day of the next fiscal/academic year.

All students waiting for graduation in the following year must visit a number of companies for interviews and exams, starting 9 to12 months before graduation. If someone fails to find a job this way, he/she usually intentionally stays in the institution sometimes intentionally failing the examination of a compulsory subject. In this way they can get another chance the next year, keeping the status of "new graduate". Any interval between graduation and employment will be a serious handicap in the labor market.

Employers also suffer from serious problems. Firstly, because of the long-term employment system (with almost no possibility to employ anyone by way of trial), they have to anticipate how each young candidate will perform at the age of 40 or 50, and this is virtually impossible. Secondly, because of the above-mentioned simultaneous recruitment system, all employers must competitively rush for interviews with their candidates in order to get good new graduates. They can usually spend some 20 minutes to select students, who might work there for 30 years.

In such a situation, the most economical and efficient way for employers to select students is based on the "name" of their universities/colleges, i.e. relying on higher probability to find good ones at prestigious universities. This is, therefore, not a problem of education systems nor "attitudes" of employers but just a simple result of cost/benefit consideration to select good employees with minimum costs within the framework of the present labor market system.

Under such circumstances, all high school students rush to compete in the entrance examinations of prestigious universities, which are prepared by each individual university. Then, all junior high school students, in turn, must rush to compete in entrance examinations of so-called good high schools to have a better chance to go to a good university in the future. This way, the peculiar labor market system for new graduates has been negatively affecting education in the lower grades even at the kindergarten level.

It is also said that Japanese college students in humanities and social sciences courses are not keen on studying. A number of people in Japan say that this is a problem of "attitudes" of students, however, a major reason for this is that they actually do not have to study hard because they already have a certain level of "passport" (i.e. the name of the institution) for the labor market.

One of the major policies for promoting lifelong learning was to encourage so-called "recurrent education", viz. admission of adult students to universities and colleges for the development of professional skills. However, although a number of measures have been taken and almost all universities and colleges are open to adult students, such schemes have not been widely used. This is again because of the above-mentioned labor market problem. There are only a few adults who would quit their present job to study in a university. This is because they cannot reenter the labor market under the same conditions as new graduates. Having already graduated and changing one's job already means a handicap in the Japanese labor market.

Therefore, the majority of recurrent students are sent by their companies/employers, keeping their status as employees, paid by the employer, and with the understanding that they will return to original working place. However, it is said that they do not have strong incentives to study hard because their salary scales are fixed by their original academic backgrounds (when they were new graduates) and going back to university will not mean a lot back in the company.

### Is the Situation Really Changing?

An increasing number of economists and other experts say that the Japanese labor market is rapidly changing. Because of the recession, it is now becoming difficult for many employers to maintain long-term employment or to further develop enterprise-based education and training. Therefore, a number of companies are now more eager to employ specialists who can contributed to the business immediately, and many of them are not new graduates. Also, the brand-name of universities no longer means instant success in a company or even survival as an increasing number of employees are virtually fired though it is usually called by the elegant term, "restructuring".

Even if this is true in the Japanese labor market as a whole, from the viewpoint of influence over education, the situation has not changed at all. It is still good for students to keep the status of "new graduate", and those who have already graduated are not treated or evaluated equally with new graduates. This means that it is still better for high school students to rush to prestigious universities, and it is still better for junior high students to rush to so-called good high schools. This aspect of the Japanese labor market has been causing a lot of serious problems to students and children as well as education systems and practices, and therefore, without any change and improvement in this aspect, any change in the labor market is meaningless to education in Japan. It can also be said that because of the disturbance brought about by the recession, parents and children are even more eager to get the brand-name so that they may enter a good position at the age of 22 in a shrinking labor market.

It is, therefore, extremely important to note that most of the so-called education problems have stemmed from the above labor market problem and the heart of this problem is the "impossibility to re-enter the labor market with the same condition/treatment as new graduates". Although national and local education authorities have been making a lot of efforts by expanding continuing learning opportunities for adults, developing new systems for appreciation and evaluation of the outcomes of continuing learning activities, unfortunately there does not seem to be much improvement of the situation mainly because they could not change the above labor market system.

### b. Expanding "Leisure-Oriented Learning Activities"

The second reason to promote lifelong learning in Japan was the necessity to expand the supply of various leisure-oriented learning opportunities. This, however, does not mean to promote learning activities just for fun. It is related to the Japanese way of thinking about education and learning such as the penchant for education/learning and the emphasis on spiritual aspect of education/learning. They find spiritual value in all types of learning, and even leisure-oriented learning activities have been promoted by the national and local education authorities for the development of more enriched "kokoro". In this case, "kokoro" can be interpreted as "spiritual aspect of the quality of life".

This second reason was highlighted based on the perception that the demand for such learning opportunities among the Japanese had been increasing in line with the "maturing" of the society at large. The "maturing" here was a result of various social and economic developments, e.g. increase in income, increase in spare time, the development of opportunities for higher education, the expansion of life expectancy, etc. These changes have made Japanese people more interested in learning activities not for economic purposes but for intellectual curiosity and a spiritually higher quality of life, i.e. more enriched "kokoro" and self-fulfillment.

This was just one of the three reasons to promote lifelong learning in Japan, however, this aspect has been drawing more attention than the other two. Facing the maturing of society, Japanese people were seeking for something new in an economically developed society, and wanted to improve the spiritual quality of their daily lives with a view to increasing mental satisfaction and fulfilling their intellectual curiosity and cultural aspirations. This aspect of lifelong learning perfectly fit their "penchant" for education and emphasis on spiritual aspect (kokoro) of learning, and contributed greatly to the nationwide diffusion of the concept of lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning Means Leisure Activities?

However, one can also find a negative outcome of such enthusiasm for the above viewpoint, which is that such culture/sport-oriented and leisure-oriented learning activities have virtually become a "synonym" of "lifelong learning". This is why many people in Japan, including prominent education experts, still have the misunderstanding that such activities as formal education and enterprise-based education are not included in the concept of lifelong learning. This has caused the following situation. As the image of lifelong learning has been more leisure-oriented, it has become difficult, within the framework of lifelong learning policies, to increase public resources allocated to the promotion of learning activities for practical and/or vocational skills, which are more and more needed in today's economic situation.

Moreover, some people who take the "leisure" approach often say that learning activities for practical/vocational knowledge and skills or moneymaking purposes should not be promoted by lifelong learning policies, and sometimes even argue that such learning activities should not be included in the concept of "lifelong learning". These overly kokoro-oriented people have been causing a lot of problems and confusion in lifelong learning policy making.

### c. Can We Ignore Learning for "Social, Economic and Technological Changes" ?

The third reason to promote lifelong learning in Japan was similar to those in many other countries: the necessity to continuously renew and redevelop the practical knowledge and skills of people to live in a rapidly changing society. Examples of such changes which are often cited are: increasingly rapid development of science and technology, structural changes in industries, internationalization in various aspects of the society, the advent of an IT-oriented society, and the necessity to cope with environmental issues.

As such changes take place increasingly rapidly, knowledge and skills acquired through initial education easily become obsolete, and continuing learning is becoming more and more important. However, partly because the Japanese generally hate to relate education with the economy, this aspect of lifelong learning has not drawn much attention until recently.

Also, the following two points deserve careful attention. Firstly, even for learning activities to cope with social, economic and technological changes, the Japanese would like to organize them rather for cultural purposes than for practical knowledge and skills. For example, a number of local education authorities have been organizing learning activities for such topics as internationalization, environmental issues, science and technology, however, most of them are said to be for learning such things for self-fulfillment and to develop a more enriched "kokoro".

Secondly, a number of practical learning activities to cope with social, economic and technological changes have already been carried out in most companies and firms as employee education and training. However, most Japanese people do not usually consider such activities as part of lifelong learning, partly because local educational authorities are not in charge of them, and partly because the image of lifelong learning is more leisure-oriented and most Japanese people unconsciously exclude non-leisure activities from the scope/concept of lifelong learning.

## B. Some Results of the Japanese Approach to Lifelong Learning

The above-mentioned approach to the issue of lifelong learning in Japan has caused some interesting results as follows.

### a. Non-Economic Image of Lifelong Learning

In other developed countries, lifelong learning is quite often discussed along with economic purposes and/or effects. For example, in November 1990, the OECD Education Committee met at the Ministerial level in Paris to discuss the issue of lifelong learning, and prepared a communiqué, which clearly highlighted the importance of lifelong learning as a means to cope with the economic problems of Member countries in the coming decade.

This approach, which was to consider lifelong learning as a "means" for "economic purposes", was clearly reflected in the following phrases in the communiqué:

> "in the decade ahead, OECD countries will be confronted with new economic.....changes in which knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and exchange will play a central part. The potential contribution of education and training is thus of critical importance.....the 'human factor' is fundamental to economic activity, competitiveness and prosperity."

A number of Japanese people are quite often surprised and sometimes even shocked by seeing such an economic-oriented approach to lifelong learning. What's interesting is the fact that the words "values" and "attitudes" after "knowledge, skills" in the above communiqué were added at the strong request of the Japanese Delegation.

The prevailing image of the concept and word "lifelong learning" is totally different from the above. "Lifelong learning" usually reminds Japanese people of various cultural and sporting activities for the purpose of improving the mental/spiritual quality of life, meeting intellectual curiosity, and realizing self-fulfillment, i.e. for more enriched "kokoro", rather than those for economic benefits of the learners and/or country.

## Lifelong Learning as "Investment" and "Consumption"

The leisure-oriented or kokoro-oriented nature of the lifelong learning movement in Japan is often difficult for foreign experts to understand, especially those with a background in economics. The Japanese approach might sound mysterious or even religious in some cases. The lifelong learning movement in Japan may be more easily understood by economists by highlighting its major aspect of "lifelong learning as consumption"; those in a number of other developed countries are rather for "lifelong learning as investment". Though an oversimplification in a sense, this explanation, which was first used at an OECD conference in the early 1990's, astonished but, at the same time, attracted a number of European experts, and seems to be effective, at least to some extent, for those who have some knowledge of economics.

In a number of countries, including Japan, a number of learning activities are carried out by individual learners as "investment", which means that these learners participate in such activities for economic or other "benefits and returns in the future". Also, for the governments, which promote lifelong learning by public resources, the relevant polices and measures are implemented as "investment" for the future. On the other hand, in Japan, a number of learners will pay for learning activities, if necessary, just for their mental satisfaction, spiritual fulfillment, etc. without considering future economic benefits. In economic terms, this practice is more like "consumption" than "investment".

Lifelong learning as consumption is certainly no less important than that as investment. There must also be a "market" for lifelong learning activities as consumption with a wide range of demand and supply, and therefore, there is also a wide range of possibility, necessity and significance for educational authorities to intervene in the market by certain policies and measures.

However, it should also be noted that this "investment vs. consumption" theory does not necessarily apply to the purpose of governmental policies in Japan. Even though the above-mentioned leisure-oriented learning activities of individuals can be considered as consumption, relevant policies and measures of the national and local authorities for such activities, making use of public resources, must be carried out for the better future of the society, i.e. as "investment".

### b. Wider Range of Activities Covered by the Concept of Lifelong Learning

Although many people in Japan tend to unconsciously exclude non-kokoro-oriented learning activities from the scope of lifelong learning, "lifelong learning" is theoretically considered in Japan as a "master concept". This means that the concept of lifelong learning involves all kinds of "learning", encompassing those in school education, higher education, non-formal education, informal education, professional and vocational training, cultural/sporting activities, etc. However, this extremely wide range of activities covered by the concept of lifelong learning brought about confusion and serious problems in discussions for policy making.

It should be noted first of all that "learning" is distinguished from "learning activities" at least in Japan. "Learning" means any acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. through certain experiences. This concept also includes so-called "incidental learning", which takes place by chance; people may learn something incidentally while they are just walking on the street or drinking a glass of beer. On the other hand, "learning activities" means activities carried out in order to learn something intentionally. What's important here is the fact that the concept of "lifelong learning" in Japan, which covers all "learning", includes even "incidental learning".

When the national education authorities of Japan started the promotion of lifelong learning, they seemed to have thought that the first and the third points of the necessity to promote lifelong learning, which were shown at the beginning of this chapter, would be difficult to achieve in the short run, and that the new movement should rather be used for the expansion of their measures and budgets for kokoro-oriented learning activities as well as cultural/sporting activities. However, there was a serious problem in that people in Japan were participating in a number of cultural and sporting activities not necessarily to "learn" something. Most of them were doing so just because they liked such activities, and in other words, such activities were not "learning activities". Therefore, the problem was how to related all these cultural/sporting activities to the concept of lifelong learning.

The national education authorities then cleverly decided to expand the concept of lifelong learning from "the master concept to cover all (intentional) learning activities" to "the master concept to cover all learning (including 'incidental learning')" by saying, "Learning (i.e. incidental learning) may happen in any cultural or sporting activity and, therefore, all cultural and sporting activities are included in the concept of lifelong learning."

This new definition of lifelong learning worked well to mobilize a lot of people to cultural and sporting activities as well as to expand related measures, projects and budgets. However, as the activities which may bring about "incidental learning" are not limited to cultural and sporting activities but also include all the other activities in people's daily lives, e.g. just walking on the street and drinking a glass of beer, confusion arose among policy makers themselves, especially those in local education authorities, in terms of what kind of activities should be promoted by making use of their public resources. Also, some more fundamental questions started to be asked such as: "What is lifelong learning policy?" and "Why should public resources be used for such a wide range of activities just for fun?"

# *Chapter VI*

# The Road to Educational Reform

## A. "Things to Change" and "Things not to Change"

Most Japanese people have a great affinity towards education and value it considerably, and educational reform has always been a part of the political agenda. According to Japanese experts and policy makers, since the Meiji Revolution in 1868, there have been three major educational reforms in Japan.

### Three Educational Reforms and Constant Ways of Thinking about Education

The first reform was the Meiji Educational Reform. It was implemented as part of society's modernization after the transition (revolution) from the Edo period (1600-1867) under the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate of samurais to the Meiji period (1868-1912) governed by the Emperor. The second reform was carried out after 1945 as part of post-war democratization, in which the overall educational system was changed under the influence of the United States. The third reform is presently on-going.

The first and second educational reforms occurred after revolution and bloodshed, and were due to an overall reconstruction of Japanese society. The third reform, which is occurring now, is not a result of any particular revolution or bloodshed, and society is not undergoing any overall radical changes. Probably because of this, there have been a number of discussions about "what needs to be changed" and "what should not be changed" in the world of education. However, examining the past from the perspective of "What has changed?" carefully, one can find that Japanese ways of thinking toward education have not really changed since the first reform. Even during the second reform, when there was supposed to have been a thorough and fundamental reform, the basic Japanese approach to education does not seem to have changed so much.

Before further discussing the second reform, the first educational reform will be briefly described as follows.

### Four Characteristics of the First Reform

After the Meiji Revolution in 1868, the Ministry of Education was established in 1871. In 1872 a general policy package was formed for educational systems from elementary to higher education. Through this general policy package, about 25,000 elementary schools were established between 1872 and 1880. This outnumbers the existing number of Japanese elementary schools at the present time. What's more, 20 years later, at the beginning of the early 20th century, the elementary school enrollment rate for both Japanese boys and girls reached 99%. This first educational reform after the Meiji Revolution seems to have had the following four characteristics.

Firstly, the "equality-oriented approach" was taken in order to make elementary education universal. For example, boys and girls were treated equally and there was no formal system of differentiation on former social classes. This was quite unusual for the society and traditions at that time and also different from the elementary education systems in most European countries. In the 1870s school systems which were not related to social class were found only in the US and Japan.

Secondly, regarding the development of various education systems, great emphasis and priority was put on elementary education. Most of today's developing countries tend to put emphasis on vocational and professional education in upper-secondary education as well as elitist post-secondary education in order to quickly develop human resources and produce a small elite group. However, Japan in the late 19th century as a developing country took the approach to put the first priority on elementary education for their future. They knew that raising the overall educational standard of "all people" would be more crucial for the future development of their country even if it seemed a roundabout way. A famous phrase used in the policy statement of the above-mentioned 1872 policy package clearly showed this approach: ".....so that there be no uneducated family in any village, and there be no uneducated person in any family".

Thirdly, as to the contents of learning, emphasis was placed on "practical content" to rapidly catch up with the developed countries by raising the general educational standard of all people. In elementary and secondary schooling, the fundamentals of "reading, writing and calculating" were emphasized. Also, as for higher education, as has been explained before, Japan was the first country in the world that established a department of engineering in a four-year university, and probably the first departments of agriculture and commerce at this level.

Fourthly, there was another emphasis placed on fostering "an attitude towards contributing to the nation and society". This could be considered as partially influenced by Confucianism and other traditional thoughts, however, it was surely related to the urgent necessity of the country, facing a menace from the Western powers. At that time China, which all Japanese had believed to be an extremely big and powerful country, was colonized by the Western powers, and such a situation in Asia made the Japanese, who had known what had happened during and after the "Opium War", see the urgency of rapidly modernizing the country. This fourth point may look contradictory to the above third point, however, this was not so because they were developing practical knowledge and skills based on the attitude and mindset to contribute to the nation.

With the strategy of education for modernization, Japan was able to build an intellectual infrastructure that facilitated the unbelievably fast development of their economic and military power up to the mid 20th century. However, simply put, since Japan's society and political sphere were unable to catch up to the development of its economic and military power, the country carelessly took the path of militarism, imperialism and totalitarianism. As a result, after victimizing a great many people in other countries and also in Japan itself, Japan could not but accept unconditional surrender in 1945.

## Similar Characteristics of the Second Reform

After the surrender in 1945, Japan lost all of its overseas territories and returned to being a small country. Although Japan lost the war, its people and leaders did not lose their long-held belief in education and the value of human resources, and once again they put the first priority on education to reconstruct their nation from the ruins of the war. To achieve national prosperity and people's welfare, they started to search for ways to catch up with other nations in a peaceful way and boosted, as a means for this purpose, their economy instead of their military power.

It is often said that the educational reform during this period, i.e. the second reform, completely over-turned the fundamental existence and value system of the Japanese, however, is it really true? In reality, it seems that the basic approach to education did not change even after this reform.

Firstly, the "equality-oriented approach" was not abandoned but strengthened even more after the war. The so-called "6-3-3-4 system" was brought from the US and the single-track system was introduced to the secondary and higher education systems. As to the policy for the quality of education, nationwide curriculum standards (the National Curriculum Standard) and a textbook authorizing system were incorporated into the new educational system to achieve equality in education throughout the country. As a result of these efforts in search of equality, the graduation rate for high school reached more than 90% in each age cohort, with more than 40% of students advancing to higher education.

Secondly, the idea of "importance of elementary education" was carried on as the idea of "importance of basic education". Compulsory education was stretched to nine years, and some 4% of the national income was invested in primary and secondary school education. Japanese people continued to believe in the importance of elementary and secondary education and, as described earlier, they never thought about cutting back the educational budget for basic education.

Thirdly, the "importance of practical and useful content" in education also continued. Through a special law, science education was emphasized at the elementary and secondary levels. As for high school, Japanese students always achieve very high levels in the subjects of math and science on international comparative exams. Also, the post-war higher education rapidly expanded engineering education and created a situation where 30% of students at national universities were enrolled in engineering departments.

Fourthly, such pre-war ideas as ultra-nationalism and the teaching of unconditional service to the nation were all abolished, however, education for "attitude development" remained as education of "kokoro". One important thing that deserves special attention is the fact that this emphasis on attitude was changed after WWII from that for concrete goals, e.g. the mindset to contribute to the nation, to that for an extremely vague one, i.e. the full development of "kokoro". Here came a slight contradiction between the above third point and this fourth point because of the vagueness of the latter. This has been one of the reasons why the emphasis on practical aspects of education after WWII, e.g. science and technology, has been criticized by "romanticists" who put ultimate value on non-practical goals in education, i.e. "kokoro".

This way, the major part of the Japanese ways of thinking toward education seems to be unchanged since the late 19th century. It is, therefore, crucial for the Japanese to have a clear understanding on "what has changed" and "what has not changed" as well as the relation between "what has been done" and "the results" in order to constructively discuss possible reforms, i.e. "what should be changed for what".

## B. Some Factors Impeding Constructive Reform Discussions

### a. New Drives towards Further Reform

The phrase, "the third major educational reform" was first used in 1984 when the government's Educational Reform Committee was established by the then Prime Minister as an ad hoc committee. This committee, which continued discussions for three years and issued a series of reports, did not belong to the Ministry in charge of education but directly to the Cabinet. Following the reports of this committee, the so-called third reform was started in the latter half of the 1980's, and this means that the third major reform has been continuing more than a decade.

On the other hand, according to many critics, the situation of Japanese children has been going from bad to worse. Also, some other major drives towards a further and better reform are arising in terms of both "kokoro" and "knowledge and skills".

## Renewed Emphasis on "Kokoro"

A new drive towards further educational reform has moved once again towards "kokoro", however, this seems to be somewhat different from the traditional Japanese emphasis on it. In the past, the necessity of the education of "kokoro" meant, "Japanese children are not bad, but they will become much better by further education of kokoro." On the other hand, today's new call for more education of "kokoro" seems to mean, "Japanese children are in a really bad situation, and their attitude should be reeducated and redressed by education of kokoro."

This concern among a number of Japanese people was created, generated and often exaggerated by such a recent phenomenon as the increasing violent crimes of youngsters such as murder, rape, etc. (though the overall crime rate of youngsters has actually been decreasing). Although people in all countries have been saying, "Today's young people are really bad. When I was young ......," some recent crimes committed by Japanese high school students around the age of 17 really shocked and horrified a number of people in Japan, which caused a new cry for more education of "kokoro". The appropriateness of coping with such problems by education of "kokoro" will be discussed later in this chapter.

## Finally, "Knowledge and Skills"

Another new drive towards further educational reform is for more of the "knowledge and skills" needed for children to cope with on-going social, economic and technological changes. Although the fundamental purpose of education has always been placed in the development of character and "kokoro", Japanese people have started to wonder if their children are appropriately and sufficiently educated to acquire necessary knowledge and skills.

This concern and anxiety has increased in the face of the clear and serious necessity to acquire new and practical "knowledge and skills" such as Internet/computer literacy, practical English language competence, presentation/debate skills and others. It should be easy to imagine a conflict between "romanticists" (who are more oriented towards "kokoro") and "pragmatists" (who are more oriented towards practical "knowledge and skills") in the world of education in Japan.

What makes the debate between the above two categories of people more confusing is that even the "pragmatists" often put such kokoro-oriented and vague items as "creative mindset", "attitude to positively take initiatives" in their list of "newly needed practical knowledge and skills". This has always been the case in any discussion in Japan on the development of education for "knowledge and skills". Even the pragmatists could not cut all issues related to "kokoro" or attitude, and this quite often blurs the points and concrete purposes, impeding logical and constructive discussions.

### b. Lack of Logic: "Purpose vs. Means" and "Cause vs. Result"

As will be analyzed in detail in the following sub-section, the factors which seem to have been impeding discussions on constructive reform in Japan are also interestingly related to each of the three basic characteristics of the Japanese way of thinking about education. However, before discussing these three points, more fundamental problems, which are always underlying policy discussions in Japan in educational and other areas, will be delineated in this sub-section.

The fundamental problem delineated in this sub-section is the "lack of logic" in policy discussions in Japan, especially the lack of constructive discussions with a clear distinction between and clear acknowledgement of the relation between "purpose and means" as well as "cause and result".

### Purpose vs. Means

Firstly, as to the lack of "purpose vs. means" thinking, Japanese are not very good at developing constructive policy discussions by clearly distinguishing "purpose" and "means" or by clearly understanding the relationship between the two. The poorest victim (in the policy field) of this confusion and non-distinction between "purpose" and "means" prevailing in policy discussions is always education.

The first example of this problem is related to the question: "Is education itself a purpose or means?" As was stated before, the Fundamental Law for Education of Japan clearly stipulates the fundamental "purpose" of education (i.e. the full development of character), and theoretically, this should mean that "education" is considered as a "means" for the stipulated "purpose". However, since Japanese people all have an extremely strong affinity for education and consider it so lofty, most of them seem to be confused about whether it is a "purpose". This must be one reason why many of them hate to look at education as a "means" to other purposes such as economic development. To most Japanese, education is not a mere "means" for the lofty purpose of "kokoro", but education itself is a lofty practice to be pursued.

The second example of this problem is related to the question: "Is education for 'kokoro' a purpose or a means?" This is an extremely interesting contradiction with the above first example. As discussed above, most Japanese tend to think that education itself is a "purpose", and if so, it would be quite normal for them to also consider "education of kokoro" as a purpose because "education of kokoro" must appear closer to "purpose" than education in general. Actually, the slogan of "education of kokoro" is often used by a lot of people in Japan, which seems to be presenting a kind of ultimate goal or purpose. However, surprisingly, a great many Japanese, at the same time, say that education of "kokoro" should be further developed to solve social problems, i.e. as a "means". Every time they face such problems as violence and crimes of the youth, they say that education of "kokoro" should be developed to cope with these problems. Although the concept of "kokoro" is very vague without any clear-cut definition, its use as a slogan to show a "purpose" might be acceptable. However, as a "means" to solve various concrete problems, using this vague concept as a panacea for everything has been impeding constructive discussions.

The third example showing the confusion between "purpose" and "means" is an argument widely found among Japanese people that "pursuing 'efficiency' in education is bad". It goes without saying that "efficiency" is not a concept related to "purpose" but "means", and efficiency itself can never be a purpose. This is quite easy to understand if we can see that both "carrying out a war efficiently" and "pursuing world peace efficiently" are possible. "Efficiently" means pursuing a certain purpose "with a good means to accomplish it", however, a number of people in Japan, which seems to be quite an efficient country in a number of aspects, seem to hate this concept, especially in education. This may be related to the fact that "efficiency" is more or less an economic concept and Japanese people hate to relate education to the economy. However, this problem seems to be more related to the lack of distinction between purpose and means.

### Cause vs. Result

Secondly, as to the lack of "cause vs. result" thinking, Japanese people do not seem to be very good at carefully looking into a "result", looking for the "cause" which brought about that result in a scientific manner, or rationally constituting measures to cope with the "cause" in order to promote good "results" and avoid bad "results".

A previously mentioned example of the lack of "cause vs. result" thinking is that few Japanese have noticed that such "attitudes" as cooperative attitude, diligent attitude and enterprising spirit are spontaneously developed through various daily school activities.

Another example is the proposed expansion of activities for the education of "kokoro" to cope with the above-mentioned increasing youth problems such as violence. However, let's think of the situation of 40 to 50 years ago, when there were fewer youth problems. Did they have more school activities for the education of "kokoro" then? The answer is "no". This means that the "cause" of today's increasing youth problem is by no means the shortage of education of "kokoro" but something else, and therefore, to tackle the present problems it is necessary first of all to identify the real "cause". Today's claim for more education of "kokoro" derived from a number of factors and characteristics of this country, and indeed one of the most important and interesting ones must be this confusion between the result and cause.

One more interesting example of this problem is a new policy from the national education authorities to encourage the 47 prefectures to establish "6-year (local public) secondary schools". This should be good for the diversification of secondary schools and more choice for students, however, many people including experts expect this new type of secondary schools to function to abolish entrance examinations of upper-secondary schools (high schools). This latter expectation must have stemmed from a lack of understanding of the "cause vs. result" relationship.

In any country all new-born babies are supposed to be treated equally in hospitals and this means that new-born babies are in an "equality stage" of life. On the other hand, adults are not treated equally in terms of income, social status, etc., which means that they are in a "non-equality stage" of life. This means that in any country there must be a certain "streaming point" from an equality stage to a non-equality stage. In some countries where there are still some traces of class society, this streaming takes place when someone is born. However, in a number of countries the streaming point is found somewhere in the educational system, and in the case of Japan, this streaming point can be considered the entrance examination of high schools.

Japanese elementary and lower-secondary schools are extremely equality-oriented. This must be an extreme case, but it is said that in some elementary schools where the left-wing Union is strong, even in a 50-meter race in the school athletic meet, faster children should wait for slower children a few meters before the goal line and they should pass the goal altogether literally hand in hand. However, just like almost all other countries, the lives of adults are not like this. Also, just like many other countries again, universities and colleges in Japan are diverse.

Then, how about high schools? High schools in Japan are legally equal to each other. All graduates (more than 90% of each age cohort) including those from vocational high schools are granted university entrance qualification. However, university entrance qualification in Japan does not mean automatic admission to an institution, because, as has been explained, all universities and colleges prepare their own entrance examinations and high school students must take them to be accepted. This also means that there is an extremely big gap among Japanese high schools in terms of the possibility to go to so-called good and prestigious universities, which will in turn be a decisive factor for future employment because of the labor market problem already mentioned. Therefore, success in the entrance examination of a "good high school" is a crucial and decisive factor for everybody, and this is the "streaming point" in Japan, which has been causing a number of serious problems for junior high school students and still younger children.

Facing such problems, a number of simple-minded people in Japan have been arguing that high school entrance examination should be abolished by combining lower and upper secondary schools into 6-year secondary schools. As can be easily imagined, this would simply cause a "shift" of the "streaming point" to either the entrance examination of such 6-year secondary schools or that of universities/colleges, bringing about other problems for the new streaming point. Any society anyway needs such a streaming point, and abolishing an existing one, without looking at the real "cause", will never be a solution of the problem.

### c. Three Syndromes

Apart from the above-mentioned problems of "purpose vs. means" and "cause vs. result", a number of people in Japan seem to have the following three problems or "syndromes" when they discuss education policies. Interestingly, these seem to have derived from the three major ways of thinking of the Japanese, which were described at the very beginning of this book.

#### (i) "Additional Education" Syndrome Caused by the "Penchant for Education"

Firstly, Japanese people have a very firm belief that "any problem can be solved by relevant and additional education". This seems to be one of the results of their extremely strong "penchant" for education.

One problem arising from this approach is that they always simply try to "add" new education to cope with certain problems rather than to "identify and remove the causes". As has been mentioned, facing such a recent phenomenon as the increasing violent crimes of youngsters, a number of Japanese are claiming for more and additional education of "kokoro" without trying to identify the real causes. If the problem is that young people are doing something bad, then they should simply be taught "what they should not do", rather than adding new education for better "kokoro".

One of the Government's committees composed of scholars, business people and other eminent personalities even proposed to establish such new compulsory subjects for secondary education as "human life" and "human beings". They seem to think that by making a National Curriculum Standard for these new subjects, publishing governmentally checked textbooks for them, making students memorize the contents of such textbooks, and giving examinations on the subjects, problems of youngsters will be solved and they all will become good.

Another problem is that they continuously try to increase the curriculum (otherwise they do not feel easy), increasing the pressure on children. For example, when the national education authorities planned to gradually introduce a 5-day week system to school education in 1991 by taking just one Saturday off every month, strong anxiety was expressed by a lot of education experts and parents, which was based on emotional uneasiness about decreasing educational activities. The answer of the then Education Minister to a question on this point, which was officially stated at a Parliament session, was that children's learning would actually increase because the National Curriculum Standard would not be changed (which meant that the same things would be taught in slightly shorter school hours) and also, children would learn more things in various activities in the community on their Saturdays off. Interestingly and surprisingly, this explanation was accepted by parents and put the general public at ease to some extent.

## Government's Decision to Decrease Teaching Contents by 30%

Although Japan is probably the only country among the developed countries that officially sets the fundamental purpose of education not as knowledge and skills but the development of character and "kokoro", most Japanese people believe (without knowing the above fact) that other countries' children are growing richer in spirit and "kokoro". This however, is not totally wrong. No matter how one looks at it, present-day Japanese children do not seem to be growing much richer in spirit than those of other countries.

Many Japanese people point out the insufficient amount of education of "kokoro" at school as the cause of this, however, this is also a big misunderstanding as explained in the preceding sub-section. The real cause of this problem is lack of "time" for Japanese children due to the large amount of knowledge taught at school. Although education of "kokoro" is practiced in Japan, the amount of knowledge which children have to process is so large that it is becoming a huge burden on them, overwhelming the good effects of education of "kokoro". In many other countries, although systematized education of "kokoro" may not be developed or carried out at school as in Japan, since the amount of knowledge taught is less compared to Japan, children can use their extra time for activities outside school to develop and enrich their spirit without receiving education of "kokoro" from school.

Therefore, it is necessary for the Japanese to rethink whether or not what is taught at school and has been continuously increased by the "additional education syndrome" is really all that necessary for all Japanese children. There was a Japanese TV quiz show that used entrance exam questions from famous private junior high schools. The aim of show was to make fun of the adults: famous singers, movie stars, eminent scholars, etc., who could not answer these questions. However, even without being able to answer these questions, these people could live without any problems at work or in their daily lives. This means that Japanese children are going to late-night cramming schools to learn things that are unnecessary when they grow up. Thus, the Japanese have to overcome the "additional education syndrome" and to muster the courage to say, "This is not necessary for our children."

Facing such a situation and a lot of criticism against the cramming nature of school education, the national education authorities finally decided to cut back the contents of elementary and secondary education curricula by 30%, amending the National Curriculum Standard, which would enter into force from 2002. The major purpose of this new policy was to give "extra time" to schools and children so that they may improve their overall achievement level in terms of both academics and "kokoro" development, with such extra time also used for taking better care of slow learners. The Ministry's officials often said that "trying to teach 70 and achieving 60" would be much better than "trying to teach 100 and achieving 40".

However, this new policy caused great confusion and problems among a lot of Japanese, partly because it was launched without careful discussion about "what is necessary" and "what is not" (which should be the 30%), and partly because most Japanese had not yet overcome the "additional education syndrome" and they were astounded, horrified and panicked at the figure of "-30%".

The new policy caused the following two arguments to arise among people, teachers and schools, which are quite different from and even opposite to each other.

## Decreasing Academic Achievement? —Illusions and Dangers—

The first argument has come from "pragmatists" in the education world, who place more emphasis on knowledge and skills than "kokoro". When they discussed that new policy of the Government was going to decrease the amount of knowledge to be taught, they were frightened and suddenly started to argue that the academic/intellectual levels of Japanese children and students were rapidly decreasing and the new policy was ridiculous. They did not have any evidence nor statistics, however, this argument matched the uneasiness shared by the general public.

An extremely important point to be noted here is that such arguments have mostly come from university/college professors. They are not lying but they are making this argument based on their own narrow and limited experiences in terms of the decreasing academic levels of their new entrants. However, this is normal because the 18-year-old population has been rapidly declining in Japan (note: for the period of 17 years: 1992-2009, from 2 million to 1.2 million: -40%), and most higher education institutions maintained the same number of new entrants.

What they can do in such a situation is either 1) to cut down new student admission numbers, while maintaining their academic level, or 2) to organize remedial programs or courses for new entrants, while keeping their numbers the same. However, it seems that most Japanese university professors insist on refusing both alternatives, requesting high schools to provide them with high-level students. Their selfish arguments and fervently repeating unsubstantiated rumors about "a drop in children's overall academic achievement" caused uneasiness among the education-loving population.

It is a pity that there is now a mood among the Japanese that the curriculum should be increased again without any concrete discussion on "what is necessary for all Japanese children". The new policy of the Government, whether it was good or not, could have been a good impetus to start a serious discussion on this point, i.e. "what is necessary" and "what is not". However, the overwhelming uneasiness and worries seem to be ruining this chance.

## Is Teaching Knowledge Bad? –Real Danger for the Future-

The second argument is now prevailing among "romanticists" in the education world, who think more of "kokoro" than knowledge and skills. These people generally support the new policy, however, they misinterpreted the meaning of it as: "Education of knowledge itself is bad," or "Just let children learn what they want to learn when they want to do so, and teachers do not need to teach but just to support children's spontaneous learning," going to the other extreme. It should be noted here that the Japanese have the tendency to easily go from one end of the spectrum to the other, and this way Japanese children may suffer from a serious decline in academic levels in the basics in the future.

The above phenomenon has come from a backlash against the "fois gras" style of overstuffing knowledge into children, and seems to be somewhat similar to what happened in some other developed countries a couple of decades ago. For example, looking at the development of the use of computers and the Internet in schools, some teachers and education experts sharing this "romanticism" are strongly arguing that computers and the Internet should not be used for teaching knowledge and skills.

Another factor to support the above pessimistic prediction is the fact that the new policy to create more "extra time" for children actually will not work well for this purpose. Although it appears that the new National Curriculum Standard reduced the curriculum by 30 %, actually there would also be a 20% decrease in school hours because all Saturdays would be off. Also, the difference of 10% is to be filled by newly introduced "cross-curricular and comprehensive learning activities". This means that for the remaining 70% of the teaching contents, there would not be a great deal of extra time.

With the further spread of the atmosphere of: "Education of knowledge is a bad thing," among teachers, the above fact may cause the danger of an "overall achievement breakdown" for the basics in the future.

### (ii) "Mindset/Attitude Control" Syndrome Caused by the "Affinity for Kokoro/Attitude"

Secondly, in any policy discussions to achieve or reform something (not only education but almost all other areas), the Japanese tend to emphasize "change in people's attitude and mindset" not as a "result" but as a "means" to achieve certain goals or aims. This seems to be one of the results of their strong affinity for "kokoro" and attitude.

It goes without saying that the Japanese Constitution guarantees the freedom of thought, creed and conscience, and therefore, any attempt to intentionally change people's mind may cause delicate problems. However, trying to cope with any social problems, an incredibly large number of Japanese agree with the idea : "It's necessary to change people's mindset and attitude to achieve this goal." This approach can be summarized as: "If other people have the same attitude and mindset as mine, everything will go fine." It may be because Japan has a highly homogeneous society and people tend to simply believe that all people can easily share the same stand point. This approach, of course, quite often fails to achieve the goal, and in such cases most Japanese conclude, "They did not change their attitude and mindset, and they were wrong."

Some people argue that this syndrome has existed since the time before WWII. During this war, the Japanese fought against the US and other countries, believing that material disadvantages can surely be compensated by their well-trained spiritual power. With the deaths of more than 2.5 million Japanese and probably more people in other countries, they should have figured out that this way of thinking was totally wrong. However, looking at Japanese discussions on a number of issues, in which most of them argue that any problem can be overcome by the change and development of attitude and "kokoro" (similar to the concept of "spirit") without seriously and objectively discussing the necessity to change relevant "systems", a lot of people may wonder if the Japanese have really learned anything after all.

Also in other countries, one can find activities, campaigns, etc. targeting people's attitude and mindset, however, in many cases they are called activities for "public awareness raising". This means that such activities are to help people become "aware" of the present situation and problems. However, what they think and do about it in the future is totally up to themselves. On the other hand, similar activities carried out in Japan are designed to change people's attitude and mindset towards a fixed direction.

### "Attitude" rather than "System"

One of the serious outcomes of this syndrome is that the Japanese always try to solve any problem by changing people's "attitude" rather than by trying to identify the cause and to remove it, i.e. changing the "system".

An example of this point is found in a report prepared by an American team of nuclear energy experts, written after their investigation of a serious nuclear accident which happened in Japan a few years ago. This accident happened when some employees violated the company's regulations for the treatment of radioactive materials and a large area in the local community was polluted by radiation.

One very interesting point described in the American report was the following. The American system was totally different from the Japanese system. The former was based on the idea that some employees do have a bad attitude and would surely violate the regulations. Therefore, anticipating such violations and the pollution in the laboratory, there were built-in systems to contain the pollution within the laboratory or within the building. On the other hand, the Japanese system was based on the idea that all employees who had finished the education/training program must have a good attitude and would never violate the regulations. This means that once someone violates the regulations, there is no way to contain the pollution.

It is symbolic that, just after the above accident, the management of the company announced that they would strengthen their education/training programs rather than make any change in the relevant system nor the introduction of "fail-safe" or "fool-safe" systems. Therefore, such an argument as: "Each individual has his/her own desire and he/she always goes toward that direction. Therefore, to achieve a certain goal by mobilizing people, it is necessary to know people's desires and to try to control them by incentives and/or punishments," would never be accepted by the Japanese. This idea appears to the Japanese as accepting and endorsing bad desires which should be removed by education of "kokoro".

### Examples in Education Discussions

Also in coping with educational problems, most Japanese try to change the attitudes of the people concerned, e.g. parents, teachers, professors, children, students, etc., rather than by changing the relevant systems.

For example, facing the increasing problematic behaviors of children like violence and bullying in schools, almost all people in Japan including the national and local education authorities have merely been saying that they should nurture better "kokoro" of children. Some of the above problems can be solved by mental treatment and counseling for children, however, they include terrible crimes as well as those caused by children with mental diseases. These serious problems should be distinguished and should be dealt with by relevant "systems" for criminal or medical treatments. However, those problems are usually called "kokoro problems" without distinction, and thus are not dealt with using systematic and professional measures.

Some other examples of the results of this problem, which have been discussed in the preceding chapters and sections, are as follows: Facing the decreasing number of applicants (high school students) for science and engineering courses in universities/colleges, a lot of people attribute this to failure to develop children's attitude of respect and enjoyment of "making things" and "doing something scientific". However, it is clear that this argument is totally wrong because the number of applicants for medical courses (which are undergraduate programs in Japan) is not decreasing at all. The real reason for the above decrease is not mindset but something else, e.g. salary scale, working environments, spare time, etc.

Also, as the reform of higher education within each institution is not moving rapidly, many Japanese say that it is because of the attitude and mindset of university people. However, as mentioned in Chapter IV, the real cause lies in the university management systems such as the limited mandate of the Presidents, overly powerful faculty meetings, unanimous decision-making (veto) systems of faculty meetings, etc.

As to the series of problems caused by the peculiar labor market system (in which those who have already graduated are not treated equally with new graduates), a lot of Japanese attribute such problems to people's attitude and mindset. They say, for example, employers often rely on the "name" of the university to recruit new graduates and thus it is because of the employers' bad attitude; recurrent education programs of universities/colleges are not well attended because of the bad mindset of adult learners and/or their employers; and Japanese humanities and social sciences students do not study hard because of their bad attitude.

Every time they face such problems, many people simply claim that the attitude and mindset of their target group should be changed. They do not try to identify the causes lying in the systems or propose concrete ways, if any, to change people's attitude. This general attitude of the Japanese (which should be changed!) has been impeding constructive discussions in a lot of policy fields.

### (iii) "Uniformity" Syndrome Caused by the "Equality-Oriented" Mind

Thirdly, although many Japanese say that they have been making efforts to overcome "uniformity and rigidity" towards "diversity and flexibility", most people are still unconsciously inclined to uniformity. In more simple terms, they still "like" uniformity, especially in the world of education. Therefore, what's being discussed here is not simply a repetition to describe the uniformity of the Japanese education "system" again but the problem of a deeply-rooted unconscious affinity for uniformity in the "mind" of most Japanese, which they themselves have not noticed.

One very funny example is that the Japanese are actually making a lot of efforts for "diversity" and the respect for "individuality", but those efforts have been pushed and planned "uniformly". Few Japanese have noticed this strange and funny contradiction. Now that diversity and the respect for individuality are considered as good, they naturally think that these concepts should be applied to all people "uniformly".

## What's Necessary for "All" Children?

One of the most serious problems deriving from this syndrome is that few Japanese are discussing or distinguishing "what's necessary for all children", especially within compulsory schooling curriculum.

Many people are now participating in the endless discussions on educational reform, including those with louder voices and influential power such as distinguished and well-known people in the business, academic and political worlds. These celebrated people were mostly able students who seldom had difficulty with regular classes of math, science, etc. Also, most of them are working with people from prestigious universities who also had few such difficulties in their school days. These people are arguing, "Such and such is necessary for all children, otherwise Japan will fail to survive," based only on their own privileged experiences and circumstances. What they propose and claim might indeed be necessary for their successors, however, not necessarily to "all" children in Japan.

Similar problems can be found in the arguments about educational reform made by leading experts in various fields. In a conference organized by the business sector, a professor of information technology argued that computer languages should be taught to all children, starting from the first grade of elementary school, otherwise Japanese information technology will lag far behind other developed countries. If this had been a professor from the National College of Arts, he would have likely claimed that all children should learn how to play the piano, flute and violin, starting from the first grade of elementary school for the sake of cultural development of the country. Here, one can also find confusion between "what's necessary for individual learners" and "what's necessary for the society/economy as a whole".

The case of Nobel Prize winners, which was discussed in Chapter III, is similar to the above arguments, and a common problem of such ridiculous arguments is that there has been no effort to distinguish "what's necessary for 'all' children" in "compulsory" education.

Also, as to the newly emerging necessity of teaching such things as imagination, creativity, thinking ability, judgment, and debating skills, the Japanese should make careful considerations from the perspective of what is really important for "all" children. It should be intriguing or even shocking to the Japanese that, when the OECD organized an international conference on education for "thinking skills", some European experts said that there also should be recognition of and respect for the "right to be ignorant". This meant people's right to refuse to learn some additional things, which the government thinks necessary for the nation but they themselves do not think necessary for them.

## C. Three Issues Calling for Immediate Action

At the close of this chapter on educational reform as well as the book, the following three issues need to be raised again as the crucial points which need immediate actions for educational reform in Japan. However, the most serious problem for the Japanese in tackling these issues is not the development of effective policies to deal with them but rather the fact that they have not yet fully noticed that these issues are the source of most of the so-called education problems in Japan.

(i) Why do they try to teach everything to "all" children?

Firstly, as to "the curriculum of compulsory schooling" discussed in this chapter, they should immediately start efforts to identify "what's needed for all children", in other words to distinguish "what's needed for all people" and "what's needed for a limited number of them".

Without doing this, their favorite discussion on whether the achievement level of children is decreasing or not is totally meaningless. Also, it is ridiculous to make any comparison of achievement level in terms of the unnecessary curricular content.

(ii) Why don't they try to change the peculiar university/college entrance exam system?

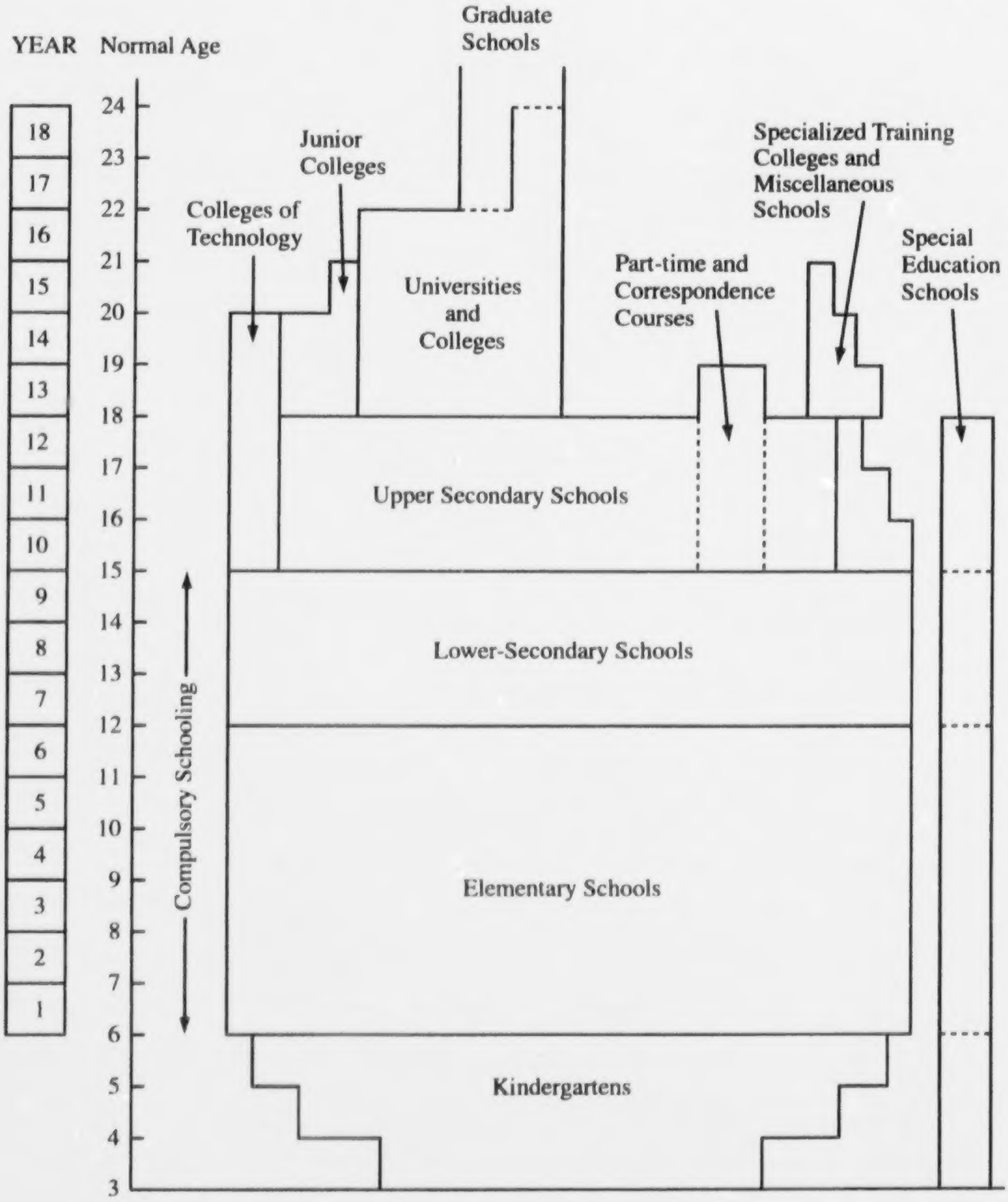
Secondly, as to "the university/college entrance examination system" discussed in Chapter IV, immediate efforts should be started to change the peculiar university/college entrance examination system, in which all universities/colleges may independently evaluate the candidates' high school achievement. This incredible system has been negatively affecting children at the lower levels of education, and this has ruined most of the reform efforts in the past.

(iii) Why don't they try to change the strange labor market system?

Thirdly, as to "the labor market system" discussed in Chapter V, immediately actions should be taken to change the strange labor market system, in which those who have already graduated from high schools or universities/colleges are discriminated against compared to new graduates, and "reentry" into the labor market is not easy. The majority of so-called education problems have been caused by the pressure stemming from the fear of failure to get a good job by the age of 18 or 22 as a new graduate. The most fundamental challenge for the Japanese is, therefore, whether they can create a society in which people can "retry" and "re-challenge" the labor market throughout their lives under equal conditions.

# 《ANNEX》

## 1. Organization of Formal Education System


YEAR
Normal Age
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Graduate Schools
Junior Colleges
Colleges of Technology
Universities and Colleges
Part-time and Correspondence Courses
Specialized Training Colleges and Miscellaneous Schools
Special Education Schools
Upper Secondary Schools
Lower-Secondary Schools
Elementary Schools
Kindergartens
Compulsory Schooling

## 2. Education Institutions

Approximate Numbers of Institutions 2000

| | Total | Local Public | Private | National |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Schools | 24,000 | 99.0% | 0.7% | 0.3% |
| Lower-Secondary Schools | 11,000 | 93.2% | 6.1% | 0.7% |
| Upper-Secondary Schools | 5,000 | 75.6% | 24.1% | 0.3% |
| Special Education Schools | 1,000 | 94.0% | 1.5% | 4.5% |
| Colleges of Technology | 60 | 8.0% | 5.0% | 87.0% |
| Junior Colleges | 600 | 9.6% | 86.9% | 3.5% |
| Universities/Colleges | 600 | 11.1% | 73.6% | 15.3% |
| Specialized Training Colleges | 3,600 | 6.0% | 90.1% | 3.9% |
| Miscellaneous Schools | 2,300 | 1.8% | 98.1% | 0.1% |

## 3. Students/Pupils

Approximate Numbers of Students/Pupils 2000

| | Total | Female | Male | Enrollment Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Schools | 7,400,000 | 48.8% | 51.2% | 99.99% |
| Lower-Secondary Schools | 4,100,000 | 48.8% | 51.2% | 99.99% |
| Upper-Secondary Schools | 4,200,000 | 49.8% | 50.2% | 95%(age 15-17) |
| Special Education Schools | 90,000 | 37.2% | 62.8% | |
| Colleges of Technology | 60,000 | 18.7% | 81.3% | |
| Junior Colleges | 330,000 | 89.6% | 10.4% | 42%(age 18-21) |
| Universities/Colleges | 2,700,000 | 36.2% | 63.8% | |
| Specialized Training Colleges | 750,000 | 54.1% | 45.9% | |
| Miscellaneous Schools | 220,000 | 51.5% | 48.5% | |

(By Type of Institutions)

| | Total | Local Public | Private | National |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Schools | 7,400,000 | 98.5% | 0.9% | 0.6% |
| Lower-Secondary Schools | 4,100,000 | 93.5% | 5.7% | 0.8% |
| Upper-Secondary Schools | 4,200,000 | 70.3% | 29.5% | 0.2% |
| Junior Colleges | 330,000 | 6.4% | 91.2% | 2.4% |
| Universities/Colleges | 2,700,000 | 3.9% | 73.3% | 22.8% |

## **4. Field of Study** (Distribution of Students)

### (1) Upper-Secondary Schools 2000

|  | Academic | General | Vocational |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Commerce | Engineering | Agriculture | Home Economics | Other |
| Total | 73.3% | 1.7% | 8.5% | 8.8% | 2.8% | 1.7% | 3.2% |
| Female | 75.6% | 2.0% | 11.3% | 1.6% | 2.2% | 3.2% | 4.1% |
| Male | 70.9% | 1.4% | 5.7% | 15.8% | 3.3% | 0.3% | 2.6% |

### (2) Universities/Colleges (Undergraduate Only) 2000

|  | Humanities | Social Science | Education | Science | Engineering | Medicine | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 16.6% | 39.9% | 5.6% | 3.6% | 18.9% | 2.6% | 12.8% |
| National | 7.1% | 16.9% | 17.1% | 7.2% | 31.2% | 6.2% | 14.3% |
| Private | 18.9% | 45.8% | 2.9% | 2.6% | 16.1% | 1.6% | 12.1% |
| Local Public | 17.9% | 34.2% | 1.3% | 4.4% | 14.9% | 5.0% | 22.3% |
| Female | 30.2% | 29.3% | 8.9% | 2.4% | 5.1% | 2.3% | 21.8% |
| Male | 8.7% | 46.1% | 3.6% | 4.2% | 27.0% | 2.8% | 7.6% |

## 5. Teachers/Professors

Approximate Numbers of Teachers/Professors 2000

| | Total | Female | Male | Student/Teacher Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Schools | 408,000 | 62.3% | 37.7% | 18.1 |
| Lower-Secondary Schools | 258,000 | 40.5% | 59.5% | 15.9 |
| Upper-Secondary Schools | 269,000 | 25.6% | 74.4% | 15.5 |
| Special Education Schools | 59,000 | 57.0% | 43.0% | 1.5 |
| Colleges of Technology | 7,000 | 6.5% | 93.5% | 8.0 |
| Junior Colleges | 50,000 | 39.8% | 60.2% | 6.5 |
| Universities/Colleges | 288,000 | 16.7% | 83.3% | 9.5 |
| Specialized Training Colleges | 148,000 | 39.3% | 60.7% | 5.1 |
| Miscellaneous Schools | 29,000 | 37.6% | 62.4% | 7.7 |

## Author's Personal History

**OKAMOTO, Kaoru**

1979 BS at the University of Tokyo (Geography)
1980 Official, ACA(Agency for Cultural Affairs), Government of Japan
1981 Administrator of the Science & Technology Policy Division, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development)
1982 Official, MESSC (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports & Culture), Government of Japan
1987 Professional Staff Member, CERI (Centre for Educational Research & Innovation), OECD
1990 Deputy Director, International Affairs Division, MESSC
1992 Planning Director for Lifelong Learning Policies, MESSC
1995 Director, International Copyright Policies Division, ACA
1999 Director, IT Policies Coordination Division, MESSC
2001 Director, Copyright Policies Division, ACA

(Publications)
1990 * "Foreign Students in OECD Countries"
1992 * "Education of the Rising Sun"
1994 "Introduction to Lifelong Learning Policies"
1994 * "Lifelong Learning Movement in Japan"
1997 "Education in a Land of Mystery"
1997 "Copyright in An Internet Age"
1999 "Major Points to Cope with Internationalization"
2001 "IT and School Management"
2001 * "Education of the Rising Sun 21"

* : in English

《A Comment on the Title》

A number of foreigners believe that "Japan" means "the country of the rising sun", however, this is not true. "Japan" actually means "the place from which the sun rises", i.e. the country in the east. For the Japanese in ancient times, the world was so small and they knew only Japan, Korea and China. Since Japan was the country in the east among them, they simply called their own county "the country in the east". Then, what is the antonym of Japan? The answer is "Magrib", the original meaning of which is "the place to which the sun sets".

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